# HONIARA

## VILLAGE-CITY OF SOLOMON ISLANDS

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| | |
|---|---|
| TOL | Temporary Occupation Licence |
| TVTC | Teacher and Vocational Training College |
| UK | United Kingdom |
| UQ FML | University of Queensland, Fryer Memorial Library |
| US | United States |
| USNARA | United States National Archives and Records Administration |
| USP | University of the South Pacific |
| WPHC | Western Pacific High Commission |
| YWCA | Young Women's Christian Association |

been at what is now called Honiara International Airport—Henderson Field,[6] although sea travel is still my favourite means of moving around the islands. For the first time since 1976, in 2017, I arrived at Honiara on a ship, P&O's *Pacific Eden*. We tied up at a much more sophisticated container wharf than the one at which I first stepped ashore.

Honiara has changed over the years as the urban area spread along the coast and inland into the valleys. In the 1950s, Point Cruz—named by Spanish explorer Álvaro de Mendaña de Neira in 1568—began to be expanded into a sizeable port. By the 1970s, a lot of reclamation work had already been completed. In 1976, the main government buildings were clustered on both sides of and inland from Point Cruz. Shops were strung out along Mendana Avenue between Point Cruz and Central Market, which was in the same place as now, but smaller. 'Namba 9'—once the 9th US Casualty Clearing Station, then the Central Hospital, and now the National Referral Hospital—remains close to the Mataniko River. In the 1970s, Chinatown, on the banks of the Mataniko, was the second commercial hub. Riots in 2006 destroyed many of its quaint wooden buildings, although by then the commercial centre of Honiara was at Ranadi, further east.

In 2020, most of the city's houses either balance on the series of undulating ridges or squat on valley floors. In the 1970s, houses along the coast around Rove were the most sought-after residences for government ministers and senior public servants. The middle classes and the rich lived on the ridges, particularly at Lengakiki and Nggosi, or further east at Skyline, Kola`a, and Panatina. Poorer residents lived in the valleys or on the slopes of the ridges. Woodford School, begun in the mid-1950s, was still in the middle of downtown Honiara, opposite the National Museum. The Anthony Saru building and its shopping arcade have replaced it. In the 1970s, large red buses trundled about, along with a few minibuses and cars, and trucks. People often travelled crammed on to the backs of trucks and utilities. They still do when coming from rural areas into town, or travelling for political rallies, or customary ceremonies. There are now large numbers of cars and minibuses, which have made Honiara's

6 When the Japanese Government funded an upgrade of Henderson Airport in 2003, they suggested a change of name. A petition against this, and US diplomatic intervention, led to the airfield being renamed Honiara International Airport—Henderson Field.

traffic jams notorious. Since 1994, the National Parliament has sat high on Vavaea Ridge above Point Cruz, creating a central focus. In the 1970s, the High Court building doubled as the parliamentary chamber.

Unlike Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea's capital, positioned on commodious Halifax Harbour, Honiara has no substantial bay. It sits on a curve in the coast with small Point Cruz as the central promontory; the point was originally an island joined to the mainland by a swampy causeway. Unlike Port Vila, Vanuatu's smaller capital on Efate Island, which is set on a safe harbour and is replete with sidewalk cafés showing its French influence, Honiara is often caricatured as a hick town that too hurriedly became a city. It lacks the lush surrounds of Lae or Suva, or the large non–Pacific Islander population of New Caledonia's Nouméa. Yet, for those who live there or who visit regularly, Honiara has a laidback, pleasant nature and is a likeable place—a rumbustious and ever-growing Pacific urban sprawl. On any given day, thousands of residents perambulate constantly along Mendana Avenue, the coastal road that stretches from White River to the Mataniko River. Its name changes to Kukum Highway as the road continues past the National Referral Hospital, the Malaitan Fishing Village, Ranadi industrial estate, Burns Creek settlement, Lungga industrial area, and on to Honiara International Airport—Henderson Field. People walk to Central Market or city offices, or take minibuses to work, school, and shopping, along routes that move travellers about cheaply and efficiently, along the coast and snaking into the hills. The problem is that peak-hour traffic is now so congested that it is often quicker to walk short distances—for instance, from Point Cruz to Central Market—than to take a bus.

Honiara is a homely city made up of long-established middle-class and elite suburbs, as well as large areas of insecure land leases renewed annuall and squatter areas—the last two both best described as urban villages or settlements. Socially, Honiara has much in common with other Pacific cities. Its village-like qualities are hard to come to terms with, but future planners must understand its hybrid links with rural areas if they are to plan wisely and cope with future developments and flashpoints. Sadly, recent town planning documents show few signs of any accommodation of the unusual circumstances of Honiara's development, nor much cognisance of the poor urban planning in the 1960s and 1970s that created the present situation. This point is picked up again in Chapter 10.

A recent Asian Development Bank (ADB) paper described Honiara as a ‘village city’, which nicely depicts the combination of suburbs and settlements, and provided the title for this book.[7] However, rather than a Pacific village-city, the recent urban plans seem to replicate a modern Australian city, although there are the beginnings of an attempt to come to terms with the dominance of settlements. Despite having its own act of parliament, Honiara City Council is relatively powerless. The mayor and council must always negotiate with national government ministries, and with the administration of Guadalcanal Province. The council and its mayor do not control the city in a way that could be expected of an equivalent large urban area elsewhere.

## A city of contrasts

Honiara is a city of contrasts and not everyone is impressed. Many visitors and some residents find Honiara overwhelming and without grace. Eric V. Lawson, a prominent businessman who lived there for 24 years from 1947, uncharitably called Honiara ‘just a dump’.[8] Its worst critics emerged before and during the Tension years—the period of violence and civil unrest between 1998 and 2003. Travel writer Paul Theroux visited the city in the early 1990s:

> My first impression was of a place so ramshackle, so poor, so scary, so unexpectedly filthy, that I began to understand the theory behind culture shock—something I had never truly experienced in its paralysing and malignant form. The idea that such a miserable-looking town could be regarded as a capital city seemed laughable.
>
> … The Solomon Islanders in Honiara were among the scariest-looking people I had ever seen in my life—wild hair, huge feet, ripped and ragged clothes, tattoos on their foreheads, ornamental scars all over their faces, wearing broken sunglasses.[9]

Although he softened his attitudes a little once he talked to a few people, such hyperbole is hard to believe from such a seasoned traveller. Perhaps he was trying to be provocative, as he had little good to say about other Pacific cities either.

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7 ADB 2016; see also 2017. In 1974, Ian Willis published *Suburb, Village and City*, the title of which was a similar play on words.

8 Solomon News Dr[hereinafter *SND*], 11 July 1975.

9 Theroux 1992: 148, 159.

He was not the only one to deride the city. Will Randall visited during the Tension years, when, admittedly, Honiara was not looking its best. Even so, his unkind description of the city as 'the unsightly boil in the navel of the otherwise dazzling, seductively beautiful Solomon Islands' and as a 'hungover vagrant' gazing 'blearily out across its one main street to the sea'[10] is unfortunate vilification. Charles Montgomery was equally unflattering about Tension-era Honiara, repeating the same style of negative imagery:

> [T]he storm of dust and refuse, the plastic bags that rolled like tumbleweeds across the road, the heaps of garbage that smouldered like castles after a siege. And this, spray-painted across an abandoned building: 'Welcome to Hell'.[11]

After around 60 visits, I must admit to being fond of Honiara. What Theroux, Randall, and Montgomery missed is that Honiara and its surrounds can be very beautiful, and the people are charming, friendly, and gentle, although often shy of foreigners until they get to know them. The city stretches along the coast; the views of neighbouring island groups and the sunsets, with volcanic Savo Island as part of the backdrop, can be astounding. The view into the mountains of Guadalcanal—Mt Popomanaseu, inland from the Weather Coast, reaches 2,335 metres, 107 metres higher than Australia's Mt Kosciuszko—is awe-inspiring. Unlike in Western cities where the inhabitants scuttle past ignoring each other, in Honiara, people do not usually rush about; they amble along—a product of the heat and a desire to put social relationships first. No acquaintance goes ungreeted and everyone is acknowledged. There is an etiquette of respect for personal space that is appealing. Passing directly in front of another person, or between two people who are talking, is considered rude. It is taboo to step over the legs of a sitting girl or woman, although this seldom can occur as they are trained never to allow it to happen. There is no begging in the streets, and in markets there are fixed prices, politeness, and honesty when returning change. When passing, men and youths usually meet your eyes and smile and say hello, using raised eyebrows as part of the greeting, and women and girls will also smile a hello, a little more demurely.

10 Randall 2002: 150.
11 Montgomery 2004: 159.

Kola`a Ridge intersection, and out on the road to the airport, regardless of occasional city council attempts to close some of them. Small makeshift shops sell household items in the settlements and suburbs. Betel nuts, lime, and pepper leaves[12] and single cigarettes, or cooked chicken or fish, can be purchased from roadside vendors. Potent kwaso (homemade alcoholic spirits) and marijuana are readily available in all parts of Honiara, including Central and Kukum markets. Honiara, with its flourishing cash economy, is a complex meeting place for people and products from all over the Solomons.

I feel at home whenever I return, seeking out new buildings and developments, looking at new fashions and interactions. There were low times in the 1990s and 2000s when I was able to judge the weakness of the economy by the size of the potholes in the road from the airport. Viewed from a distance, the drivers appeared drunk as they weaved slowly all over the road, trying to avoid the cavities. Even though repair is now much better on the tar-sealed main roads, this still seems to go in cycles. In late 2013, once more the main roads were falling apart; the repairs were few and inadequate. The contractors had patched the roads for show, not longevity. In mid-2017, when dignitaries arrived from all over the Pacific to mark the end of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI),[13] the main roads were full of potholes once more, patched up with gravel, not bitumen. By October that year, the 'drunk drivers' were back, easing cars in and out of potholes. The main Mataniko bridge has been doubled in size, and a Japanese aid project restructured the main road in the Mendana Avenue and Kukum Highway area. Upgrading of the road from Point Cruz to White River has begun. Regardless of the improvements to the coastal road, driving around Kobito, Gilbert Camp, and White River or anywhere in the hills, ridges, and valleys is always a slow experience as cars manoeuvre along decaying roads—a reminder to citizens of Honiara that urban facilities are still limited.

12 Chewed together, they have a mildly narcotic effect.

13 Under the auspices of the Pacific Islands Forum, in 2003, RAMSI was begun to bring an end to civil conflict and stabilise the nation. See Chapter 9.

## Urbanisation

Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji, and Papua New Guinea have the most rapidly urbanising populations in the south-west Pacific. As shown in Figure 9.1 and Maps 10.4–10.5, an ever-increasing number of Solomon Islanders—around 25 per cent—now live in what is termed Greater Honiara, beyond the boundaries of the Honiara City Council. The overflow of city boundaries is similar in neighbouring nations. Vanuatu's total population is around 300,000, of whom about 30 per cent live in the Greater Port Vila area. More than 50 per cent of Fiji's total population of 900,000 now lives in urban areas, with 15 to 20 per cent of Greater Suva's 244,000 population living in settlements in the Suva to Nasau corridor. Papua New Guinea now has a population of close to 9 million. Its capital, Port Moresby, is home to 400,000 people, and some estimates suggest that half of them live in informal settlements. Another 600,000 live in other PNG towns and cities.[14]

My training is as a historian, not a geographer or social scientist, which are often the dominant genres of urban academic writing. Cyril Bellshaw's book *The Great Village* about Hanuabada, Port Moresby, and John Connell and John Lea's *Pacific 2010*, about urban Polynesia, come to mind.[15] In the south-west Pacific, if we exclude settler societies on the fringe in Australia and New Zealand, there are few wide-ranging monograph histories of Pacific towns and cities. There are of course chapters, academic articles, and reports on aspects of Pacific urbanisation, although many of the most recent emerge from allied social science disciplines that study aspects of contemporary development, governance, gender, climate, environment, social change, youth, employment, policing, economics, and politics, not history. Often these publications have little chronological depth, the necessity of which I regard as a hallmark of good urban history. I am interested in the *longue durée* of change over time—and how people use social space and urban settings in their own ways, regardless of attempts by planners to shape and control developments. I also freely borrow techniques from different disciplines to achieve my aims. After all, Solomon Islanders have created their own urban environment, which

14 Keen et al. 2017: 31–48. See also Jones 2012; and ADB 2016.
15 Bellshaw 1957; Connell and Lea 1994.

replicates and extends some patterns from rural villages. They use space quite differently from the way the British and post-independence planners envisaged. I have tried to trace the way these changes have occurred.

It is worth a reminder that urban development is alien to Melanesia's pre-contact societies, and that Honiara is a uniquely large urban centre in the nation.[16] Originally, Solomon Islanders lived in small communities—usually hamlets or villages sustained by subsistence agriculture, hunting, and coastal fishing. They came together in large numbers only during warfare and trading, or for feasts and festivities—gatherings of hundreds, not thousands, of people. This all began to change after 1897 when the first substantial urban settlement was begun on Tulagi. Previously there had only been small trading and Christian mission stations.

The urban centres that grew were all government towns, except for Paeu, which was established on Vanikolo Island in the 1920s as a base for a substantial logging company, and Noro near Munda on New Georgia, a fishing port and processing plant begun in the 1990s. Government towns were established on Gizo Island in the New Georgia Group in 1899, at Auki (`Aoke or Rarasu) on Malaita in 1909, Ontong Java Atoll (Luangiua or Lord Howe Atoll) in 1915–16, at Kirakira on Makira (San Cristobal) in 1918, and Lata on Nendö (Santa Cruz) in 1923. There was also a government base at Faisi in the Shortland Islands from 1906, and another began at Aola on Guadalcanal in 1914, neither of which developed into substantial urban areas. By the 1920s, there were eight administrative districts: the Ngela Group; Mala (Malaita); Guadalcanal; Gizo; Shortlands; Isabel and the Russells; Eastern Solomons (Makira and Ulawa); and Santa Cruz. Later, the number of districts was reduced to four: Western (based at Gizo), Eastern (based at Kirakira), Central (based at Tulagi, and then Honiara), and Malaita (based at Auki). Until Honiara was established, the headquarters for Guadalcanal District was at Aola.

Living patterns for some Solomon Islanders began to alter in the late nineteenth century, not only through the government towns but also through large coastal mission villages and plantations. Early in the twentieth century, coconut plantations became new gathering places for labourers, who began and ended their contracts at Tulagi and other government centres.

16 Goddard 2019.

# Indigenous movements leading Z , ` K Þ Ã % R Ã Z , %

Indigenous social and political movements such as Maasina Rule and the Moro Movement also led to greater concentrations of population in some areas. Maasina Rule (1944–52) began in `Are`are, Malaita, at a time when many Malaitan men were working in the wartime Labour Corps on Guadalcanal and in the Ngela Group. *Maasina* means 'his brother' or 'his sibling', or even 'his friend'. Maasina Rule was a radical reorganisation of Malaitan society with the aim of enabling Malaitans to regain control over their lives after decades of British government. The movement's members were influenced by American servicemen, including African Americans, whose humane treatment of them and political advice encouraged them to take a stand against the old colonial system. The leaders spread a message of the need for Malaitan independence across the island, advocating improvements in agriculture, concentration into larger, cleaner villages, and later, non-cooperation with the BSIP Government and Christian missions. These teachings were coupled at some stages with hopes for liberation by the Americans, and millenarian ideas. This latter aspect of the movement was often exaggerated by contemporary government officials, and later by anthropologists and historians influenced by their accounts. The movement soon spread to all areas of Malaita, and to neighbouring islands, particularly Makira and parts of Guadalcanal. For eight years, the movement dominated the political scene in the central Solomons. It was an indigenous proto-nationalist movement grounded in a desire for self-government and self-determination.

In the late 1940s, Maasina Rule towns were built on Malaita to accommodate several thousand people.[17] Given the preponderance of Malaitan residents in Honiara in the second half of the 1940s and 1950s, should these Maasina Rule towns be considered transitory and ephemeral, or could they have played a part in early Malaitan thinking about Honiara? Many Malaitans never liked the Maasina Rule towns: the imposed social closeness, and having to live with people who were not close kin, far from their gardens and ancestral lands. Solomon Islanders from the provinces often still feel this way about Honiara. Not everyone wants to live there. Some prefer not to visit Honiara at all or, if forced to do so, they escape the hurly-burly as soon as possible. The quiet of rural

17 Akin 2013; Bennett 1987: 202–310; Keesing 1978a, 1978b; Laracy 1983.

areas, the support of kin, the ability to live from their own garden produce and fishing, and the comfort of living on ancestral lands will always be important for the majority.

The Moro Movement, the other indigenous movement that influenced Guadalcanal, was begun by Pelise Moro in the late 1950s to gain social, economic, and political improvements on Guadalcanal through cooperative economic enterprises. These changes were combined with a high regard for custom and tradition to synthesise a new social order. It was a 'back to custom' movement and had magical and spiritual elements. Moro was born in the mid-1920s and lived at Makaruka village on Tasimauri (meaning 'live sea'), the name for the Weather Coast of Guadalcanal. The Moro Movement can be partly understood in the context of World War II and the Allied presence on Guadalcanal, the long-term migration of `Are`are Malaitans to Marau Sound at the eastern end of the island, and the government's neglect of the Weather Coast. The Moro Movement called the island 'Isatabu', instead of Guadalcanal (the Spanish-inspired name), and for many decades was a significant regenerative force for traditional life. It was also residually involved in the Tensions that occurred between Malaitans and the people of Guadalcanal in the 1990s and 2000s.

In the same way that the people of the north coast have links to Savo and the Ngela Group, Marau Sound at Guadalcanal's eastern end was settled some 13 generations ago by migrants from the `Are`are language area on the west coast of Malaita. There were already `Are`are links to Marau Sound when the Mendaña expedition visited in 1568, and there was always regular canoe traffic back and forth, and trade and kinship links. This ancient connection seems to have increased in the mid-nineteenth century. The people were divided between those living on the islands around the sound and those on the mainland. During Maasina Rule, the Marau `Are`are felt themselves to be part of the movement. In 1953, preparations began to form the Guadalcanal Council, although in 1954 two of the Marau villages (Hatere and Niu) wanted to join the Malaita Council instead. When this was rejected by the protectorate administration, they, along with the neighbouring Veuru Moli people, asked to be allowed to form their own Marau–Hauba Council, which occurred in 1955. There was considerable tension between the Marau 'saltwater' people, who were determined to expand their interests on Guadalcanal, and the bush people. The Marau Malaitans claimed control

In 1972, more than 1,000 visitors arrived at Makaruka village from all along the Weather Coast and Honiara, including a Canadian television crew and a research team from the University of Hawai`i's East-West Center. Government officials, including District Commissioner James Tedder, also attended. A special feast had been organised to celebrate the first arrival of humans to Isatabu and the creation of the island's strong customs. Moro issued the invitation for people to participate to show that his movement had a rational design and was not a cult. Accompanied by 10 male escorts, Moro was dressed in shell money—an extraordinary display of wealth. All guests were allowed to visit the custom house and the 'house of memory', if they were wearing custom garments: tapa cloths for men and grass or string skirts for women, with the concession of a tapa cloth top for European women. The village normally had only 10 houses; an additional 190 had been constructed for the visitors. Dances were held and displays of fighting were arranged.

At independence in 1978, Moro and his followers were invited to Honiara to join the cultural activities. The movement—strongest in the late 1950s and 1960s—continued to exist into the 1990s. In 1985, it celebrated its 30th anniversary. The Moro Movement had loose connections with the Isatabu Freedom Movement, the militia group that from 1998 to 2003 tried to rid the island of the large Malaitan presence, and to restore control by Isatabu people. Moro died in 2006.[18]

## Modern urban settlements

In the early 2020s, there are only five substantial urban areas in a nation of approximately 721,000 people: Greater Honiara, with its population estimated to be 160,000;[19] Gizo, with 7,000 people; Auki, of similar size to Gizo; Noro, with around 4,000 people; and Lata, with 2,300 people. There are now nine provinces, which has meant the creation of new urban centres; Buala in Isabel Province, Taro in Choiseul Province, and Lata in

18 Davenport and Çoker 1967; Davenport 1970; O'Connor 1973.

19 Estimates of Honiara's population depend on the boundaries used. The peri-urban population blends into surrounding Guadalcanal Province. As well, the significant daily movement of people from the provinces to Honiara makes estimating the population difficult. This is especially true for movements between Auki and Honiara. Many Malaitans see Honiara (not Auki) as the end of the market route because they are able to get in and out of Honiara on ships daily. Solomon Islands Government [hereinafter SIG] 2009: Basic Tables and Census Description, pp. 5–8. Based on the 2019 national census, the National Statistics Office estimate for the population of the Honiara City Council area is 130,178, with another 30,000 in the peri-urban area. SIG 2020g.

Temotu Province are recent urban developments. Tulagi, the capital of the protectorate until 1942, is now the headquarters of Central Islands Province. The difference between Honiara and the next biggest urban centres is significant.

Map 0.3 Modern Solomon Islands urban centres.
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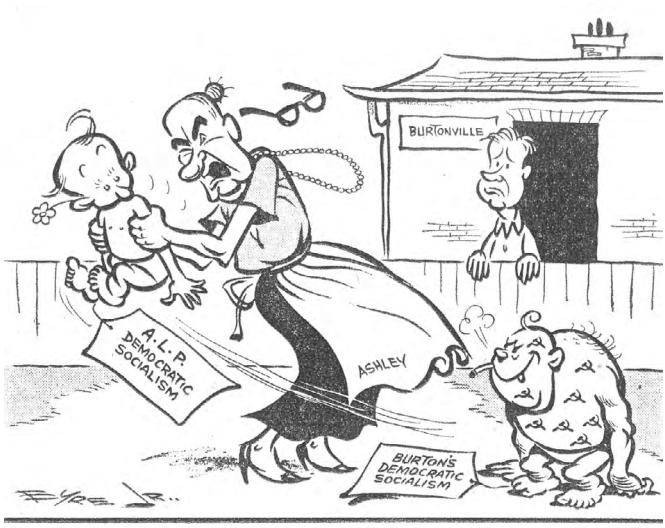



*"Come away from that brat! D'you want to catch his spots?"*

**'Burtonville', Eyre Jr (Junior Harry Eyre) cartoon, undated (likely March 1957), depicting Senator Bill Ashley, minister and leader in the Senate in the Labor Government.**

Source: Burton family papers.

*"Arhh! Leave the kid alone! We're not catching any fish, anyhow!"*

**Burton rocking the ALP boat, Eyre Jr cartoon, undated (likely March 1957), depicting (from left to right) Senator Bill Ashley, Eddie Ward, Doc Evatt and Burton.**

Source: Burton family papers.

**Virgil Reilly cartoon, likely produced for the *Daily Mirror*, 1956–57, depicting Evatt and Burton, a commentary on the political flak created by John's pamphlets.**

Source: Burton family papers.

**George Molnar cartoon, likely produced for Fairfax newspapers in 1957 after the ALP Federal Conference in Brisbane, 1957.**

Source: Courtesy Katie Molnar, George Molnar collection 1955–1991, National Library of Australia.

# 28

# The Snowy Mountains bus, bubble cars and other ventures

In the early 1950s, thousands of workers from European countries were recruited to work alongside Australians on the ambitious construction of the Snowy Mountains hydroelectric scheme, the biggest civil engineering project ever undertaken in Australia. The winters were long and cold, the work gruelling, but the pay and accommodation were reasonable. John recognised the hardship these men endured – their loneliness away from their families – and saw a way of improving their lives. He approached Sir William Hudson, the commissioner of the Snowy Mountains Hydro-electric Authority, for permission for the Green Square bus to visit the construction camps to provide the workers with items beyond the essentials supplied to the camps. John had known Hudson, a civil engineer, since 1949 when Prime Minister Chifley appointed Hudson to manage the scheme. ASIO's version is that much of the success of Green Square enterprises came from this initiative because John had 'sole distribution rights' at the construction camps.[1] However, while the venture proved profitable, John did not require any 'sole' rights. There were no competitors who either thought of or were interested in finding a way to meet the needs of these workers. In any event, also noted by ASIO, John credited the success of his business overall to Sabne and her extensive retail trade experience.

1 NAA: A6119, 337, Burton vol. 6, 263.

Geographically isolated from large cities, the construction workers had little to spend their money on. A major problem was the roads. They were unsealed, steep and winding, some cut into mountain cliffs, and at times many were impassable in dangerous weather conditions. It was difficult to ensure reliable delivery of even basic consumer needs. A priority was to transport material for the construction of workers' huts, small churches and schools for the children in places like Island Bend, Guthega and Khancoban.[2] There was an unmet appetite for books and appliances, especially if they were delivered. John adjusted the fittings of the bus to accommodate a display of a variety of products including carefully selected books in various European languages, records and gramophones on which to play them and electrical items such as electric blankets and toasters. The bus was open for business until late at night to cater for shift workers. The advent of the Green Square bus warmed the hearts of many lonely men.

Demand for the goods John stocked was constant. The nights at the camps were long and cold and radio reception was poor. The workers relied on books and records for evening entertainment. Later John extended his stock to include stationery, magazines and foreign newspapers. Newspapers and small electric appliances sold well. Initially, John drove the bus himself to ensure the roadways could take the heavy vehicle but also to find out more about the workers' needs and their environment. In this action we see a glimpse of his father's Methodism and desire to improve the lives of those in need. It also demonstrates the belief he had in himself, like his father, that he knew best how this could be done. By mid-1958, he was running the bus up and down to the Snowy Mountains on a weekly basis. Sometimes he had to stop to hack trees and shrubs whose growth had encroached onto the muddy roads and obstructed the bus's progress to what was known as Thiess Village and, later, to Cabramurra where it was expected to be overnight each Thursday. Rain, hail or snow, the bus made it through. On one occasion when the roads were barricaded because they were too treacherous for vehicles, the men at the camps protested so strongly that an exception was made for the bus to pass.

John had left room at the back of the bus for bunk beds and essentials for a driver's overnight stays. It was an adventure for us to travel with him and sleep in a bunk bed on the bus overnight. Meredith marvelled at

2 See Ruth Arndt, 'A Bustling Business', *Canberra Times*, 19 October 2000, 11; and Arndt, 'Waiting for a Bus Have Snowy Workers Some Instant Relief', *Canberra Times*, 16 December 1999.

the high cultural tastes of the 'men on the Snowy' who were hungry for cultural material. Robert ('Bob') Armstrong, a civil engineer, while not an immigrant, wrote to me in 2011 about the life-changing effect the bus's visits had on him and others working on the Snowy project. He said:

> I soon discovered *Burton's Book and Record Bus* and it really did give me the incentive to buy and read and study good literature and appreciate all forms of music … It stopped me from heading to the bar after work and in the evenings after dinner. I think in a way your father kept me on the straight and narrow.[3]

He sent me a draft extract from a memoir he was writing of his description of the bus and its importance:

> Dr John Burton's bus was a lumbering large old ex-Canberra suburban bus in which he had removed all the seats and each side of the aisles he had put in jam-packed book shelves, record racks full of joy, a stationery department and a magazine stand for Australian and imported magazines and out-of-date foreign newspapers, the latter of which sold like hot cakes to the three thousand hardly English speaking workers from Europe. He drove the old bus from Canberra and did a weekly circuit of all major Snowy construction towns and camps. It was a priority that, irrespective of the weather, Burton's Book and Record Bus gets through, even if it had to be towed. It was really the only thing that kept a lot of us lonely single staff from becoming alcoholics, or losing our minds.[4]

Thanks to the bus, Bob built up an extensive eclectic library and record collection. He acquired books by Agatha Christie, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Steinbeck, Norman Mailer, Truman Capote, Francoise Sagan and others, poetry including Keats and Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood,* plays of Oscar Wilde and Noël Coward, the lyrics of Gilbert and Sullivan operettas and *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*. His record collection included *Salad Days*, *Carmen*, the *Purple People Eater* and Irish folk songs.

Bob recalled the day in 1958 when he introduced his new girlfriend, Ruth, to the harsh conditions under which the Snowy scheme workers lived. The workers relied on pot-belly stoves and wood heaters for cooking and

3 Personal communication, 2011, Burton family file.
4 Robert Armstrong, draft chapter, 2011, Burton family file.

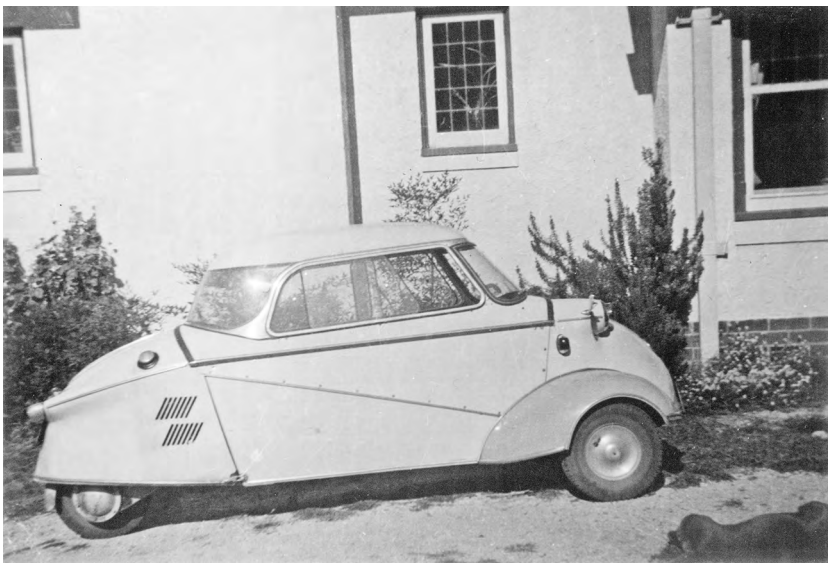
warmth, and power generators for refrigerators. Snow was thick on the ground. The couple arrived at his room in the Cabramurra staff barrack block and Ruth, intrigued with Bob's books, fingered the collection and said in jest, 'Can I move in?' Bob credited the bus's visits to his continued courtship of Ruth that led to a lifelong marriage. They lived at Thiess Village, where the bus also visited, for two years. The couple eventually settled in Sydney and lived a happy 51 years together until Ruth's death. The story Bob told me is that, one Thursday, when he was at work and Ruth was at the camp alone and bored, John and his bus arrived. Ruth asked John if he had any watercolour paints. He said he was sorry, he hadn't any. He was able only to sell her a Croxley sketch book. On John's next visit, he brought with him paints, pencils and artist paper for Ruth. The sketch book was treasured; it was filled with poetry the two copied into it and notes that Bob left Ruth each day before she woke. Without John, he said, Ruth would not have extended her stay and their relationship would have had no chance to flourish.[5]

As soon as John was sure of demand for what the bus stocked, he employed a skilled Canberra driver, a migrant born in Azerbaijan and who was fluent in several European languages, to trial the bus travelling regularly to selected Snowy Mountain camps. The workers welcomed the service and made personal requests for goods, electrical equipment, special song albums, writing paper and newspapers. The bus increased the frequency of its visits to twice a week. Word spread through the construction tunnels and men assembled at various points to wait for the bus. The driver had to rug up overnight to keep warm. Then, one night, he suffered a cerebral aneurism while sleeping on the bus. He was transported to Sydney as his condition was more than the Cooma or Canberra hospitals could manage. He recovered, but never resumed driving. John engaged various drivers, never any as reliable as the Azerbaijanian. At one time, John engaged his young friend Jim (later Justice) Staples to drive for him. Staples, having lost his job as a legal officer in the attorney-general's office apparently on discovery of his past membership of the Communist Party, welcomed the opportunity. The job helped him save sufficient money to help establish himself in, what became, a successful career as a barrister at the Sydney Bar. Staples told us many tales about his Snowy bus trips, including an encounter he had with police over 'sly grog' that Staples took into

5 Armstrong's story is drawn from his draft memoir and personal communication in 2011 after Ruth's death, Burton family file.

a camp to drink with the men. He was caught and had to talk his way out of an overnight stay in a police cell. Inevitably, the bus broke down, leaving Staples stranded and sometimes cold and wet while he attempted makeshift repairs. On 31 August 1960, according to my diary, worse, 'the bus engine went up in flames'. It was fixed, however, and by October 1960 its popularity was such that the road edges were carved by local authorities to ensure the bus could reach further afield such as Khancoban.

As if running a bookshop and mobile buses was not enough, in January 1959 John took up an agency to import and sell Messerschmitt three-wheeled 'bubble cars' from the shop. The cars had a 200 cc single cylinder engine. They were built in Germany in the 1940s and 1950s, initially developed to transport wounded soldiers. Two hundred and fifty of these tiny vehicles were imported into Australia. The vehicle was roadworthy and cornered well, but somewhat underpowered going up hills. The Perspex bubble roof opened to the side and closed down over the seated driver and passenger. The driver had a sense of being in a cockpit although the seat is only inches from the ground rather than high in the sky.



**The Burton's Messerschmitt, Hobart Avenue, 1959.**
Source: Burton family collection.

The component parts of the cars arrived in large wooden packing cases. John set up a workshop at the back of the shops where he assembled the vehicles. The process was not unlike the modern IKEA model. Boxes were opened and bits and pieces were fitted according to instructions. It required a smaller person, like me at age 13, to help with aspects of their assembly. On occasion, I would squeeze into a car to access the engine from inside and push through nuts and bolts to be screwed in the engine from the outside by John or his helper. The car was small enough to be displayed in the bookshop window. The first car sold on 10 January 1959. John gave Meredith a Messerschmitt to drive to university. She attracted more attention from male students than she wanted. Once, she emerged from a lecture to find her car missing. It had been hidden in bushes. Another time, boys took it to a campus theatre and lifted it onto the stage.

John kept juggling various balls, having too many in the air at any one time. He managed to control some, but others got away. In 1959, in partnership with Sir Mark Oliphant and Sir John Crawford, John applied for a licence to run a local television station. Their application caused a stir. The leader of the Democratic Labor Party, Senator George Cole, concerned about left-wing control over television when it was introduced in Canberra, asked questions in parliament about the three men's bid for their company to obtain a Canberra television licence.[6] The 'Burton team' was unsuccessful.

By 1960, however, John was finding it more and more difficult to cope. The licence hearings drew out to the middle of 1960 and John relied on Sabne and others to keep his business running. Sometimes he would have to drive a Messerschmitt to Sydney to deliver to a buyer. On many occasions, if a bus driver fell ill, John had to drive the Snowy bus and spend days at a time away from home. At one time, he had to run the bus on alternative weeks because of a driver's illness. At the same time, John continued to command media attention with his outspoken views. He made trips to Sydney and Melbourne to give talks or lectures. A television interview he had in Sydney on 8 May 1960 was headlined in a news article the next day, '"Party system outmoded" says Dr Burton'.[7] It reported John's view that the failure of the two-party system arose out of our democratic electoral system. His reasoning was that, in catering for a majority of voters, it often ignored the needs of minorities.

6 'Question Asked in Senate on Canberra TV', *Canberra Times*, 4 September 1959.
7 *Canberra Times,* 9 May 1960, 3.

Eventually, in June 1962, the owners of the large bookstore of Angus and Robertson Ltd took over the Green Square shop and Sabne as its store manager. For a time, it continued the services provided by the mobile unit to visit schools and libraries and communities in the Snowy region.[8] In the meantime, a lot had been happening in John's and Cecily's lives on both the shop and home fronts.

8 *Canberra Times*, 15 June 1962.

# 29

# A family in crisis

On 17 January 1959, with temperatures hovering in the 90s (mid to high 30ºC), Cecily, John, Clare and I went to meet Meredith at the Queanbeyan railway station, across the ACT border. She was returning to Canberra from a week-long Student Christian Movement conference at Geelong in Victoria. For all the world, my 17-year-old sister in her pretty summer frock looked a million dollars and very happy. Meredith had obtained a teacher's scholarship to attend university. Following our father's footsteps, she had commenced an economics degree in 1958 at Canberra University College, later The Australian National University (ANU). Meredith was a year younger at school than those in her cohort because she had been progressed after a parent–teacher miscommunication. Being young for her grades as she progressed through school saw her commence university at age 16. Fearing failure, she studied hard in her first year and it took its toll. She worried about her exam results and felt certain she had failed. In early January 1959, when our family was holidaying at a friend's house in Seaforth, Sydney, anxious Meredith took up smoking. Then, her results arrived; she had done extraordinarily well. A relieved and happy Meredith left us in Seaforth to travel to Geelong to attend her conference.

On greeting her at the train station a week or so later, she was on a high – but too high as it transpired. She told us that she had had a wonderful time. She had met a young man, went late to bed, rose early, and had very little sleep. 'Max', her newly acquired boyfriend, was a history tutor and, she told us, he was coming to visit to meet the family. It was clear from her talk and demeanour that Meredith was not her usual self. Two days later Max arrived. He was pleasant and clearly fond of Meredith. However,

Meredith was manic and quite unwell. Max was asked to leave. Meredith later wrote to him and, perhaps because he had been frightened or hurt by the experience, he did not reply.

It seemed that Meredith was suffering bouts of psychosis that accompanied her manic behaviour. She needed medical attention. John was quick to act and contacted Cecily's sister Eleanor in Sydney. She and her husband, Frank Hughes, were general practitioners in Sydney and immediately arranged for Meredith to be admitted into Broughton Hall, a residential psychiatric hospital. By this time, Meredith believed she was Rita Hayworth. Accordingly, she acted and behaved impeccably when Cecily escorted her by plane to Sydney on 23 January. Meredith wore a blue-and-white polka dot cotton dress, which had a harem hem line that created a flounced skirt, and matching blue suede shoes. Her shiny brown hair was fashioned in pageboy style and she looked the part. Broughton Hall sat in large parkland grounds and offered a variety of recreational and therapeutic activities. The environment was calming and well resourced. We wonder now if Meredith's illness resonated with Cecily, she having endured a psychotic event some years earlier. While John had not appreciated that Cecily had been on the precipice of serious mental illness, he had quickly recognised that Meredith was ill. He wanted her to have the best attention available.

Cecily visited Meredith the following weekend, John visited the next and so it went on. They reported Meredith's ups and downs. If neither could make it one weekend, one of John's or Cecily's sisters visited Meredith. Fortunately, Clare and I were busy with school and other activities. I had swimming training most nights, I played netball, squash and tennis and attended art and music lessons. I also spent a lot of time with my school friends. We took ourselves to the movies and rode our bikes or caught buses to the Olympic swimming pool on the north side of town. At home, we had finches and canaries in a large outdoor birdcage to care for and goldfish in a tank inside. I also had Bimbo to confide in, my loyal doggie friend, his legs too long to allow him to be called a dachshund. He followed along behind my bike wherever I went and sometimes came to school. Helpful to me, during these troubled family times, was talking to myself by writing in my page-to-a-day diary.

John and Cecily, anxious about Meredith, paid attention to Clare and me as best they could. Each had different parenting styles and priorities. John was a good father in the sense of being the family provider. He placed high

priority on providing for our health care and education. Cecily was more concerned with our emotional wellbeing and security. They combined their strengths and worked together in Meredith's interest. At the end of February, the whole family travelled to Sydney to see Meredith and spend a few days with her at the Hughes's beach house. We came home without Meredith, however, who returned to her institutional care. A month later, Cecily brought Meredith home, ending her nine-week stay at Broughton Hall. She was happy to be home; appropriately happy, this time. The following Friday, Good Friday, the family and a friend of Meredith's and mine, drove to the Cotter for a picnic and a swim. The next day we had a drive to our old farm at Weetangera. Life returned to a semblance of normalcy. Unfortunately, the drug Meredith had been treated with to bring her mania down left her with an ongoing depression. For six months she was able only to resume her studies at University College on a part-time basis. It was then that Meredith's fellow students had their mischievous fun with the Messerschmitt she drove to and from the university. Despite her obstacles, Meredith's university results in 1958 and 1959 led to an offer of a place in the honours course at the University of Melbourne.

Meredith's crisis was over, but problems for the family generally were not. Cecily and John's marriage struggled to survive and Clare and I were not easy to manage at home. We were demanding teenagers concerned more with our own lives than that of our parents. There was constant discord at home. Clare had become 'too friendly', from John's point of view, with the young man next door. Had John known, then, what lay ahead for her in terms of having a relationship with Max Campion, he might have welcomed rather than opposed her taking an interest in someone younger. Arno was one of two young German men boarding next door in the same digs Sabne had stayed in. He was about 22, good looking, respectful and resourceful. John did not like his interest in Clare, however, and would not allow Arno in the house. Cecily stood up to John and confronted him. She saw it important that we brought our friends to the house.

I caused John concern by disappearing on summer evenings to attend swimming training at the Manuka Pool and, more often than not, I was not home in time to join the family for the evening meal. John knew a little about my swimming coach, a Hungarian refugee, but not enough to entrust his daughter to his care. As it transpired, there was good reason in this particular case, not that John could have known at the time. The coach was later investigated, convicted and gaoled for sexually abusing young girls. Despite John's support of many immigrants in their efforts

to obtain work and settle in Australia and the advice he gave Arno and his friend about employment and investment opportunities, he displayed emotional irrationality when it came to these 'new Australians' getting close to his daughters.

We girls argued against his insistence on reviewing films we wanted to see. He assumed the right to 'veto' (his word, which we had first heard him use when discussing the 'power of veto' of members of the UN Security Council) any film he thought unsuitable. Meredith recalls that he 'vetoed' American films; anything American was suspect. He set curfews for when we must be home. He collected Meredith from dances or parties at 10 pm, when the function was in full swing. He waited up for her if she went out on a date and stood on the inside of the front door, she believes, to check up on whether her beau gave her a kiss goodnight. Perhaps it was his Methodist Protestant ethics that drove his need to restrict or control our activities or, more likely, it was knowing what he had been like as a young man. Cecily trusted our judgement implicitly and opposed John's restrictions. Family arguments broke out.

On the evening of 28 December 1959, John did not come home. The next morning, I rang him. He said, 'If you want to see me you will have to come to the shop.' I did not go there; instead, I cycled to the Manuka Pool with my best friend, swam, came home and made myself lunch and waited. John did not come home for dinner that evening either. We did not know why or what was happening. Cecily would later suggest that, with her becoming more self-assured and us fast growing up, John felt that he was losing control over the family; he had no sheep to round up and he could not keep control of his household. John stayed away. The arguments over Clare and me became 'the reasons' for him leaving home. Sabne was not mentioned. He slept at the bookshop, he said. If he spent nights with Sabne at her flat he did not say so. John's father, Jack, who had been staying with us, had left Canberra earlier that month, so explaining away John's absence was avoided.

New Year's Eve approached. A party at our place had been arranged. John delivered a note to Cecily to say that he would come home for it to avoid embarrassing her but that he would return to the shop afterwards. Cecily made the arrangements and allowed us to invite our friends. Arno came in from next door as part of the group of others in that household. Cecily's and John's university and family friends rolled in. We had loud music, there was dancing and kissing at midnight. We presented as a united family.

But for Cecily, putting on a brave show, it must have been a terrible strain. However, her resilience was calming for us and, while her mind must have been in turmoil, tensions in the house dissipated.

A day or so later, Cecily took us to visit John at the Green Square shop. He offered to take us to dinner at a Chinese restaurant in nearby Queanbeyan. If we expected a family discussion that would resolve everything, it did not happen. Nothing 'domestic' was discussed. Then, on the drive home, Clare, who could not stand the tension anymore, raised her issues with John: about him, Arno, everything, so far as my scrawled childish handwritten diary reveals. Emotional outbursts filled the car, tears and loud voices, but no resolutions nor constructive talks. It seemed that John was trying to establish 'the norm' that he and Cecily had separated. We girls did not understand that, believing that all would soon be resolved and John would come home. Clare followed up with a letter to John telling him just what she thought. He responded by noting comments on it and returning the annotated letter to her. It further fuelled her emotions, and the whole family was miserable.

Cecily kept the show on the road. In January 1960, she arranged a family holiday at the beach without John. He continued to live at the shop from where he travelled to the Snowy to keep the bus business running and to Sydney as his activities required. Cecily assured him that he was welcome to join the family at any time. He turned up at the beach for a day and, as a surprise for me, brought one of my school friends with him to stay with us for the week. John, however, returned to Canberra.

Another dispute was brewing. Clare had just completed her school leaving certificate and had done well in her matriculation. She had her heart set on being a preschool teacher. Both Cecily and John wanted her to go to university. Arguments broke out and she felt alienated as John and Cecily joined sides against her on this one. School was back for me; Meredith was preparing herself for her first university year in Melbourne; Clare's direction was in limbo. It was difficult for all of us, as rumours circulated about our parents' separation and neighbours and friends tried to intervene and attribute blame. My schoolfriends grilled me, one having seen John buying himself a new shirt from J.B. Youngs' clothing store in Kingston. Men did not do their own shopping in those days, and so, was he not living at home? Couples with children rarely divorced then either, and separation was only a step away. Canberra was a small town and our family had attracted a lot of publicity over the previous decade or so.

Gossip was to be expected. The parents of one of my friends shied away from allowing their daughter to spend time with us; yet this was a time when I needed my friends around me.

Marriage counselling was not then in vogue, although John was taken with the concept when he heard about it in New York some years later, and Cecily would train to become a counsellor in a later career move. However, in early 1960 when the family was struggling to deal with this domestic crisis, Cecily called on the family accountant, Bruce Owens, to try and fix things. She asked him, 'What do we do about this?'[1] On Wednesday 27 January 1960, Owens came to our home and talked at length to each of us and to John in particular. He tried to talk all of us into seeing sense; a mediation of a kind, but John was more or less hoping that we, not he, might be brought to order. We were up until 11 pm. I wrote in my diary, 'He helped us a lot'. Why the accountant? Poor Owens must have felt out of his depth. However, John by now had large debts from his capital investments and there were huge financial implications if a marital separation were to occur. Owens felt uncomfortable taking on this unofficial role, as I later learned from his son when we were both older. Taking John's concerns on board, Owens talked to Clare about her future and to me about my swimming activities and asked all of us to make compromises. We were three strong-minded children and John remained stubbornly uncommunicative. Cecily, always reasonable, firmly maintained her ground.

It was a confusing time for a 13-year-old. I wrote in my diary, 'I have been sad lately', listing 'Dad's upset' as the first reason, my girlfriend not talking to me, and boyfriend troubles as others. Then, with Owens's help, Clare, Cecily and John struck a deal. Clare was to complete one year at university and then, after that, if she wanted to leave and attend teachers' college, she could. Owens warned John that he could not carry on like this indefinitely and, if he did not go home, it would be the end of the marriage. Owens did his best to facilitate John's homecoming and family mattered to John. In any event, grandfather Jack was due to return in April; another reason for John to return home and be amicable.

On 9 February 1960, John came home – with conditions. Clare had to respect his wishes about Arno and I had to be at home for dinner! I wanted my dad to come home more than anything, but at the expense of

1 Parker, interview by Meredith Wilson, 2004, 58.

my swimming training? I wasn't happy about this demand. John slept the night at home. 'Damn him!' I wrote in my diary. 'So I will go to training after tea sometimes … I'm all in a muddle and not feeling very happy. The girls at school haven't been very nice (talking about me).'

Cecily managed to work out a roster for me around John's meal hour requirements so that I could attend training either before or after dinner – ('to suit dad'). On the first occasion that John became aware that I was off to training after dinner, he drove me to the pool. 'I don't know why,' I wrote in my diary. I now suspect he wanted to check out 'the Doctor', my Hungarian swimming coach. In general, he started to involve himself much more in my life and activities. On one occasion, he invited the coach home to our place with others in the squad for some food, singing and fun. It was his way of getting to know who I was mixing with and, important to him, regaining some control.

# 30

# A love triangle

Cecily and John tried to keep up the appearance of a united marriage and family throughout 1960. Fortunately, our home was very much an open house. People called in unannounced and our friends freely came and went, which kept ASIO busy.[1] Sabne visited, as did other bookshop staff, neighbours, our parents' friends and their children. Nugget Coombs, who knew about our family troubles, visited too. He would sit cross-legged in a wide chair – his short legs making it possible – and, holding a glass of red wine, he would tell us stories in a strong deep voice that defied his small stature. An ongoing social trait of our family was that John and Cecily, having befriended people, did not abandon them. This would play out well in decades to come, as Cecily and John kept in touch with people with whom they had engaged in the past, including former boyfriends or husbands of us three children. Inwardly, our family was not always cohesive, but we seemed to provide a family haven for many others.

Cecily had obtained work in 1960 with ANU as a research assistant in the Department of Demography, working on a study of British migrants, which she enjoyed. Her path crossed with Robert Parker's at the university. They saw each other at collegiate morning teas and, it would seem, she started to talk with him in an open and personal way about John. In April 1960, Parker left with his wife Nancy for a period of study leave in the UK. Cecily reported on John in a letter to the Parkers: 'It is quite amazing – John has started getting breakfast and washing up, which he never did

1 Meredith's former boyfriend, Barry, was a steady visitor, by reason of which both he and his family attracted ASIO's attention: NAA: A6119, 337, Burton vol. 6, 270, memo of 28 January 1960 with attached report on investigations into Barry's family background.

while I was working for him! Men are very hard to understand!' She told them that Clare and John were getting on better too and that 'altogether the household is pretty equable and relaxed'.[2]

Clare had been distraught because Arno had returned to Germany. She acquired a nervous 'jumping' habit, and it had become noticeably worse. Then, she received a letter from Arno and the spirits of the whole house lightened. She must have been home from Sydney during the university holidays as, by this time, she was enjoying university, finding that she was a natural student, excelling in English, history and psychology. Her 'jumps' though, developed into a nervous tic that refused to go away. Meredith's doctors supported her move out of Canberra and away from her parents to Melbourne where she might have 'a social' life. In 1960, Meredith transferred to the University of Melbourne and resided in University Women's College. John made a point of visiting her there from time to time. Coombs included Meredith in a meal with her college head, Myra Roper, in May 1960. In a letter in reply to Meredith's thank you note, he expressed his pleasure that Meredith's move to Melbourne provided an opportunity for her and her father to know one another better. He wrote, 'I can assure you it is worth while – he is a fine man'.[3]

Throughout 1960, I was throwing myself wholeheartedly into everything that came my way, having no more than an occasional quarrel with my father over my swimming. He smacked me on my leg with a ruler once, a rare action for him. I had grazed that leg earlier in the day having fallen down a stone wall at school and the ruler stung. We did not talk to each other for several days. Cecily did not intervene. She did not attempt to 'fix' everyone's relationships in the household. It was important that John worked out his own relationships with each of us and clearly, she believed, I could hold my own. She said of me in a letter to Parker: 'John doesn't stand a chance any more if she and I really want something – he does his best to talk her out of things, but doesn't succeed.'[4] I managed to work out my relationship with John by working around him. When he was away on the Snowy bus run, I resumed my swimming. When he returned, I engaged with him. We played squash at the nearby courts, chess at home, and on one occasion he took me to what today we might call a 'chick flick'. 'He must be getting soft,' I wrote in my diary. He was

2 R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200, box 46, file 189, 6 April 1960.
3 Nugget to Meredith, 20 April 1960, Cecily family file.
4 R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200, box 46, file 189, 6 April 1960.

trying harder to please us, and Cecily and I enjoyed him bringing each of us breakfast in bed on Sundays. Cecily told Parker that 'there really is a change in the place' and that John was 'much happier too'.[5]

My diary would suggest that family life more or less resumed. But, in truth, the household limped along. John must still have been seeing Sabne. He was frequently late home and away a lot, often at the Snowy for a week at a time because of the driver's illness. I wrote in my diary: 'he is never home'. Cecily must have sensed something was wrong because she told the Parkers in another letter to them in April 1960 that she wished she could take over in the Kingston shop for John: 'but it's all I can do to get Sabne to talk to me – so even if I were free it wouldn't work out'.[6]

In June 1960, she wrote to Parker telling him about her work and learning of the life histories and expectations of British migrants. She said, 'I wish you were here to have morning tea with.' She went on:

> I just thought I'd like you to know about Burton developments – because if you came back and found us the happiest couple in Canberra, or else separated and/or divorced you would wonder how it all came about.
>
> Well, not long ago I was all for up and going – I waited till all the kids were around and turned on a wonderful scene and meant every word of it for quite a few days. However, I quite simply couldn't. The facts of the matter are that John <u>believes</u> he hasn't loved me for years and years, and not only that but he <u>believes</u> he can only love me if I conform to his requirements. I say 'Here I stand, I can do no other', and until you think I am OK I am your wife in name only, or words to that effect, and I am staking my future on the fact that he has enough goodness and common sense to think I am worth having as I am – I hope I don't have to wait too long, because I don't like being celibate one bit. He is an idiot you know! Any way there is a good deal less reserve and more spontaneity around the house now, and the kids seem to think better of me rather than worse, all the dragons have now popped up their heads, so we don't need to expect any more! I have joined Meredith's gallery of family portraits (which formerly consisted of one – John) and I take this to be a very good sign. It's strange how things come about. Just because we think things are too awful to face they torture us – if we are prepared to put our heads on the block, fully expecting to be beheaded, nothing happens.

5 R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200, box 46, file 189, 6 April 1960.
6 R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200, box 46, file 189, 6 April 1960.

> I'd like you to show this letter to Nancy – mine to her is full of waffle, so I don't want you to read that if you don't mind – I write sometimes just to straighten myself out, and the letters probably deserve to be burnt immediately.
>
> Looking forward to your return,
> Cecily.[7]

My diary captured signs of a domestic breakdown three weeks earlier. On 25 May 1960, I wrote: 'Dad has told mum that for 10 years he hasn't really loved her, and he only lived with her because of us.' The following day, I wrote, 'Don't know what is going to happen about dad. Hope he won't leave the house, but it is torture for mum to have to live with him knowing this.' Then, my diary reveals, in the manner a 13-year-old might note such an event, that on Monday evening 30 May 1960:

> I got involved with a 'family discussion' about Mum and Dad. Mum says we might have to move. She can't bear living with someone who doesn't love her – dad.

John went to the Snowy the next day. Someone must have placated me, because my entry for 1 June read: 'We aren't going to move at all (hoorah!) Mum is feeling happier'.

John wanted to hold on to Cecily as his companion and wife. Cecily, deeply introspective, kept looking back, questioning what went wrong with their relationship in order to try and fix it. She knew she was unhappy living with John but did not understand what the problem was or what to do about it. How Cecily had felt about her marriage is gleaned from a fictional conversation she later wrote in 1964:

> 'This is not what I call a marriage', she articulated. She felt in despair, wondering how to make a marriage out of something that was not a marriage. 'Let us talk about it', she said to him.
>
> 'What is there to talk about?' he replied. 'I can't see anything wrong. You are a good wife to me, I have no complaints.'
>
> 'But I have,' she said. 'And that's just it; you never seem to feel there's anything to talk about, whether it's us, or anything else.'[8]

7 R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200, box 46, file 189, 18 June 1960, original emphasis.
8 Cecily's 'Free writing', 2000, Cecily family file.

Cecily tried to get John to understand her needs, but he did not. She wanted him to express his love for her, give her affection and understanding, as part of the lovemaking act. She knew it puzzled him that doing things for her, giving her things, was not demonstration enough that he loved her. She wanted him to take a real interest in her and to listen to her when she spoke about difficulties she perceived she had, but he did not seem interested. She felt let down. She asked rhetorically: was it only John, or were all men content with their relationships so long as they had wonderful sex?[9]

Looking back, doing it differently, she reflected that she would not marry anyone who was not interested in her as an individual. She believed that she was one of those people who simply wanted something different and she developed an interest in understanding more about human nature, knowing that she was not alone in how she felt. She considered there were men that she might get on with very well and even love, but whom she would not have married. It would have been 'too easy'. When a few years later she took an interest in relationship counselling, her desire to understand how others felt jogged her out of over-thinking her own situation to a degree. By then, however, she had fallen in love with John's best friend. Parker picked up on Cecily's concerns about her marriage and, in June 1960, he wrote an intimate letter to Cecily and John. Noting that the television licence inquiry – in which John, Crawford and Oliphant were involved – was dragging on, led him to talk about John's 'causes'. He started with the proposition to John that 'you are not an organisation man' and followed it with the barbed remark, 'You don't even like marital organisation – if it is democratic'. Parker asked John and Cecily if they had read Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, 'the most elaborate attack on the institution of marriage I know of'. He elaborated:

> She's fighting to free women from the shackles of that man-made institution. Hence paradox: Cecily, for whom she's fighting, will dislike her for cutting the ground from under her feet; John, who is lampooned as the domineering male, may have a sneaking sympathy for the book. He may like it if only because it superbly insists on citing only one side of the evidence, and so makes out

9 The interpretations of how Cecily felt and thought arise from Cecily's private writings, journals and jottings, and conversations with us as adults. We have done our best to faithfully reflect her words and expressed feelings.

> a formidable case by ignoring all qualifications and contrary indications to its thesis. Still, it does contain a devastating number of home-truths, deployed with a knife-edged intelligence.[10]

Parker was frank about his own situation. He thought there was truth in de Beauvoir's thesis that any kind of 'love' between the sexes cannot last for more than a few months or years, though he thought the timeline somewhat pessimistic. The breakdown of warmth or ease commonly occurs after 10 or 15 years; although, he suggested, children provide a very practical reason for preserving the institution. 'To be honest, that's the line I've acted on, and must probably now abide by, but if pressed I couldn't for the life of me say whether it's been worthwhile,' he confided.

Was there a subtext about his developing feelings for Cecily? Was this the beginning of a John, Cecily and Robert love triangle? Robert, as it is appropriate to refer to him from this point of our story, seemed to be displaying acceptance, if reluctantly, of people leaving a marriage relationship. Both Cecily's and Robert's letters seemed to reflect their own and each other's human need for sex, love, warmth and ease in a relationship. Robert expanded on his thoughts and concluded:

> This must sound incomprehensible. It shows I must have been thinking about you both (whom, God knows, I love) but probably has no particular relevance to the present time. I hope you are discovering what's best for each other because it's impossible to find what's best for oneself.[11]

John did not respond to Robert on an emotional level but, in a letter of 18 October 1960, he suggested Robert meet up with him in the USA in the course of his return travels from the Moscow Pugwash Conference in December. Was Robert interested in meeting up with him? Having in mind a book he had been working on, John wrote:

> Have finished a first draft of a great work, and plan to take copies with me so as to get comments … I have written a lot of bull; but when I read what others have written I think it is not so bad …
>
> Do you know what I would love most of all in life at the moment? To pick you up on way through – dump the family, (sorry Nancy). What are your plans? At least let me know where you will be about 7 December.[12]

10 R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200, box 46, file 189, 27 July 1960.
11 R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200, box 46, file 189, 27 July 1960.
12 R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200, box 46, file 189, 18 October 1960.

Robert replied on 25 October 1960, that 'Nancy wants me to take desperate measures to comply with it …', but, he explained, 'finances did not permit'. John was palpably disappointed. 'A great pity,' he wrote on 9 November 1960, and, not leaving it there, suggested many ways that Robert might raise money to manage, or even accept a loan from John.[13] The plan did not eventuate.

The 'great work' that John referred to and the invitation he had received to attend the sixth Pugwash Conference, planned for 27 November until 5 December 1960, need to be elaborated on because, combined, they led him to find his place in academia. John had been searching for a job at a university where he could write and earn a living. As fate would have it, a month or so earlier, George Wheen had dared to invite John, his atheist friend, to give a talk at a church service. John accepted and it had proved fortuitous. Someone in the congregation approached him afterwards with an offer that John 'do a spell' at ANU. In September 1960, John joined the university's International Affairs Department on a six-month visiting fellowship to write a paper on 'Conditions for agreement by negotiating in current world politics'. John relished the idea of being paid to write about foreign policy. While at ANU, he was able to complete the work he had bragged to Robert about: *Peace Theory: Preconditions of Disarmament*, published in January 1962.[14] However, he did not enter academia without causing further controversy. It started within a month of him taking up the fellowship.

John's invitation to attend the Pugwash Conference came by way of a letter from Bertrand Russell, a noted British philosopher, logician, essayist and social critic. Russell's letter attached a draft program and explained:

> The subject of the conference will be 'Disarmament and World Security', and we hope to discuss the political, economic, technical and military aspects of these problems … From experience at previous Pugwash Conferences we know that these informal meetings of scientists can make a significant contribution towards solving the problems of the day. Recent events emphasize the instability of the present situation and the need for increased effort to improve goodwill between nations. It is clear that meetings of scientists, of the Pugwash type, have become more necessary than

13 R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200, box 46, file 189, 9 November 1960.

14 John's theory was that conditions of peace must be agreed before disarmament can be effected. Burton, interview by John Clements, 1981.

> ever. We hope that the discussion at the Moscow Conference, on the various aspects of disarmament and the methods of setting up and implementing a world security system, will not only help to create a favourable climate of opinion, but will make some practical contributions.[15]

John sought leave from his department to attend. News of him going to the conference in Moscow while working at ANU caused alarm. He was granted leave, but without pay, to attend the conference. John was not impressed, as he indicated to his friend Robert, who by this time was a reader in public administration at ANU.[16] Writing to Robert, John said:

> This great institution cannot cope with people like me. A special meeting of heads of schools decided that I could not go to Pugwash while on the pay of the ANU in case I said something they did not like. Hence leave without pay! As I am paying my own fare in any event … you can imagine I do not love your colleagues. However, just to nark them I went out and bought a new car. I do not have the affection you have for this place. I hate [the] people. The tops are such weak non-selfless types (including the new Vice) who all play politics instead of doing a job. Maybe I expect too much. I like working with missionaries.[17]

The press enjoyed the story; 'Moscow trip for Burton' and 'Burton off to Moscow', headlined news that noted that the granting of leave from ANU caused 'a stir in Government circles'.[18]

Before John left Australia, he presumptuously sent Russell a work he had completed on 'Areas of Agreement' for the conference.[19] On 21 November, John travelled to Moscow where he met up with British, American and Russian intellects. Up to this time, the conference had been confined almost exclusively to scientists representing Western and Communist

15 Letter 7 October 1960, written from Merioneth, Wales, Burton family file.

16 Parker had from 1939 to 1945 been a lecturer in public administration at Victoria University College, Wellington, NZ, before returning to Canberra University College as a lecturer in political science (where he had worked in 1938). From 1947 he was a social science research fellow at ANU and from 1949, he headed the School of Political Science and Public Administration at Victoria University College. In 1954 he returned to ANU as reader in the Department of Political Science, Research School of Social Sciences. He later became professor of political science in 1963 and retired in 1978.

17 John to Robert, 9 November 1960, R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200, box 46, file 189, 'General correspondence Burton John W, 1938–88'.

18 *Telegraph*, 8 November 1960, and *Sun*, 9 November 1960, John W. Burton papers, NLA, MS 8405, box 4, folder 18, Newspaper clippings, 1947–91.

19 Letter 9 November 1960, acknowledged by Russell in letter 2 December 1960, Burton family file.

bloc countries. Sir Mark Oliphant, physicist and director of postgraduate research, School of Physical Sciences at ANU, had represented Australia at the first conference, which took place in 1957 in Pugwash, Nova Scotia, Canada. On this occasion, invitations had been extended to selected political and social scientists to discuss problems associated with disarmament, and Oliphant had recommended John to Russell.[20] In subsequent years, John would attend other Pugwash conferences in its series on Research on International Peace and Security, in his capacity as a UK social scientist.[21] This proved to be an opening for John to have ongoing influence in international peace initiatives.

John returned to Australia on 21 December 1960. He landed in Sydney, met up with his father, and the two flew back to Canberra for Christmas. He was away on our mother's birthday, 4 December, but browsing through my childhood diaries I was pleased to note that he took care to make an advance purchase of a gift of new sheets and towels. Soon after his return, John and Cecily entertained Oliphant, Manning Clark and Coombs for dinner at our house. They talked about the conference and other aspects of John's trip and also about a forthcoming event of an entirely different kind – as foreshadowed in his letter to the Parkers:

> When you come back you will both be dragged into the Sentimental Bloke being put on by Albert Arlen Productions at the Albert Hall. Lots of drop painting. Lots of exhibitionism.[22]

And, therein begins the story of our father, John Burton, becoming a patron of the arts.

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20 Burton explained to the *Canberra Times*, 8 November 1960, 8.

21 Pugwash 9th Conference: Problems of Disarmament and World Security, Cambridge, UK, August 1962; 10th Conference: Scientists and World Affairs, London, UK, September 1962; and 11th Conference: Current Problems of Disarmament and World Security, Dubrovnik, Yugoslavia, September 1963. For a list of participants, see *Pugwash Newsletter* Special Edition, 44, no. 2 (October 2007), 39–155, accessed 10 April 2021, pugwashconferences.files.wordpress.com/2014/05/participants-and-meetings-1957-2007.pdf.

22 R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200, box 46, file 189, 9 November 1960.

# 31

# Staging musicals: 'The Girl' and 'The Bloke'

John hired Nancy Brown to do the bookkeeping for his Green Square enterprises in 1957. Nancy was a singer, stage performer and playwright, and her husband Albert Arlen, a composer, songwriter, pianist and playwright. Both had enjoyed successful theatrical careers. John and Cecily were regular playgoers at the local repertory theatre where Albert and Nancy performed. There, John and Cecily befriended the happy and likeable couple.

Apart from two picture theatres, there was little to entertain Canberra's growing population in the 1950s. Formed in 1932, the Canberra Repertory Society helped fill a cultural gap in a new town of public servants and intellectuals. It initially staged amateur productions at local radio station 2CA's theatre in Civic and then moved to larger premises at Riverside Hut 18 in Barton. The society thrives today staging shows in its own, larger theatre on the ANU campus in the centre of Canberra. Local productions were enchanting in their camaraderie between audience and performers, many of the players likely to be a teacher, neighbour, colleague or friend of those in the audience. Parker took a lead part in the Repertory's production of Peter Ustinov's *The Love of Four Colonels* in 1957. We knew many of the amateur group of players, many of whom were public servants, academics and diplomats. Nancy and Albert were significant additions to the diverse troupe of keen would-be actors and writers of the 1950s who took part in the Repertory productions.

Albert was a stocky man who gazed at his musical score through thick black-framed glasses. In her memoir, *The Black Sheep of the Brown Family: A Magic Life!*, Nancy said: 'Melody poured out of him in such rich and exotic colours that the minute he sat at a piano to play his own works he became irresistible.'[1] Buxom Nancy piled her thick dark hair high on her head. She had a forceful stage presence and a magical voice that projected throughout any theatre. The couple, known as the Arlens, began a collaboration on a musical version of C. J. Dennis's poems, initially with writer George Johnston and later in 1955 with actor Lloyd Thomson. Excited by their work, they left their jobs in that year to take their first musical manuscript, *The Sentimental Bloke*, to London hoping to have it produced. Their hopes for a theatrical hit were dashed; the British public did not seem to get Australian larrikinism and humour. The pair returned to Australia in 1956 despairing and lacking financial and organisational backing for the show. Albert shelved the manuscript of 'The Bloke' for four years. He resumed a position in the public service and Nancy needed work.

With John's entrepreneurial flair behind Albert's passion and Nancy's fierce determination, *The Sentimental Bloke* was resurrected and eventually became an international stage hit. John proved to be their lucky charm as letters and memoirs boxed in the archival goldmine of the National Library of Australia reveal. 'Little did I know at the time that John Burton would be the shuttle that would launch our rocket!' Nancy wrote. 'He was to earn our undying gratitude and respect.'[2] 'The Bloke' was produced without professional backing on a shoestring budget and relied on loads of community good will and a cast of talented amateurs. It 'world premiered' in Canberra's Albert Hall, thanks largely to John's work and connections. It became Australia's longest running and one of its most successful musicals. How the Arlens' first home-grown musical, *The Girl from the Snowy*, and later 'The Bloke', got on the road and John's role as a patron of the arts is a 1960s Canberra story worth telling.

Nancy described working with John as 'a very salutary experience'.[3] In 1957, John learned from her that Albert's creative urge was resurging. Albert had started to outline a musical set in the Snowy Mountains,

1 Nancy Brown Arlen, *The Black Sheep of the Brown Family: A Magic Life!* (Mudjimba Beach, Qld: Pixstories, 2001).

2 Albert Arlen and Nancy Brown papers, NLA, MS Acc06.172. Information for this chapter unless otherwise referenced has been drawn from these papers and from the Albert Arlen and Nancy Brown papers, NLA, MS 6311, box 15, folders 71–73.

3 Brown Arlen, *The Black Sheep of the Brown Family*.

inspired by John's interest in the area from his bus exploits. Albert had decided that if there was a literary Man from the Snowy, there must be a Woman. He wrote a new script, *Girl from the Snowy River*. John saw potential in the work of these talented artists and acted on it. On 14 November 1959, Albert 'timidly' put a proposal to the Repertory Society to stage '*Girl from The Snowy River*, a musical romance'. The board, mostly academics, was somewhat scathing about musicals and took some persuading. Nancy was disappointed about the board's 'anti-musical' attitude and its suggestion that it 'would somehow lower the tone'. It was eventually agreed that the musical would be staged the following year. John came to rehearsals, 'intrigued to see how we worked' according to Nancy. Impressed with what he saw, he offered to act as Albert's manager without fee, with a view to using his connections and business nous to get Albert's shows beyond the Repertory and on the road. Through 1960 John put his heart and soul into the project and so, in assisting this creative couple to stage their musicals, he became a patron of the arts. He worked behind the scenes as 'Manager, Albert Arlen Australian Productions', to promote their work to possible backers who saw potential in extending audience reach beyond amateur local productions. He prepared back of the envelope figures on his 'Policy Research' stationery of which he had plenty, his policy consultation business plan having lapsed or been overtaken by his other enterprises.

John's initial aim was to make ends meet on a low-key staging of the show at the Repertory theatre at Riverside. Arlen's papers reveal John's simplistic figuring of the annual cash flow that was needed. Capital of £1,000 had to be borrowed. He calculated that £60 would be required to pay 6 per cent interest. Then there was £750 for the rent, plus electricity, phones and petty cash. The sum of £1,110 or £21 10s a week was needed. On his figuring he had a shortfall of £1 3s 9d. So, he scratched out a way to cover this: 'Biscuits?? – assume clear profit 6 pence per cup'. No. It would take the sale of 430 cups of coffee to pay the weekly expenses. He got rid of the 'coffee lounge approach to success' and wrote a *To Do* list on his Policy Research letterhead. It included registering a business name and having an appropriate letterhead on which to write letters to influential people who might attend the show and support the production. Ambitiously, he listed: 'Another go at *Sentimental Bloke*'. Last but not least on the list was 'etc. etc over a few grogs'.[4]

4 Arlen and Brown papers, NLA, MS 6311, box 15, file 72, undated, around December 1959.

The project got moving. John had connections and ideas and he was persuasive, presumably more so when discussions with others took place 'over a few grogs'. On 29 January 1960, the *Canberra Times* announced 'New Musical to Have Premiere at Repertory'. The cast for what became *The Girl from the Snowy* was to include Nancy Brown in the lead role with other local Canberran players. Albert, who produced the play and wrote the song lyrics and music, was to be at the piano.

In March 1960, John registered a business name, Albert Arlen Australia Productions, and new letterhead gave the place of the business as that of Green Square Enterprises, the bookshop's Kingston address. Albert was delighted. He wrote to John on the new letterhead:

> Dear Doc
>
> Can't thank you enough for your interest and enthusiasm about my work. I think the paper's 'beaut' and I feel as if I own 'M.G.M' already. Hope 'the Girl' lives up to all your anticipations. Nancy will give you all the latest on the Firm, coming up to have a 'Dekko'.
>
> Many thanks again
> Sincerely, Albert.[5]

It was time for John to invite special people to the opening of 'The Girl'. The first was Coombs. The Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust had been set up in September 1954 under the guidance of Coombs as governor of the Commonwealth Bank. The trust's aim was to establish drama, opera and ballet companies nationally. Through Coombs, John had access to others, such as Sir Charles Moses, general manager of the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC), and John Pringle, editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*. He also invited the chairman of the ABC's board, knowing that the board was looking to increase Australian content in television and radio programs. John wrote to stage actor and film star John McCallum and asked him to invite theatre company J. C. Williamson to send representatives to see first-hand the quality of the now renamed production *The Girl from the Snowy*.

Life at home was tense because of our parents' strained relationship, but they were civil and Cecily enjoyed John's new venture. She loved 'real people' like the Arlens and other performers in the troupe. The Arlens

5 Arlen and Brown papers, NLA, MS 6311, box 15, file 72, 'Correspondence relating to production of "The Girl from Snowy River" 1959–60', undated.

enriched the lives of all of us. They shared meals with us and on one occasion Cecily accompanied Albert to an art class conducted by Robert Parker's wife, Nancy, at which Albert had agreed to pose for students. Because of Albert, I took up private piano lessons with Bill Hoffman, Canberra's renowned music critic and conductor.

The show opened on 16 March 1960. It was Canberra Repertory's first full-scale musical play. Lady Hudson, wife of Sir William Hudson, was among the audience who expressed enthusiasm for the show. So did Harald Bowden, J. C. Williamson's Sydney representative – that is, of the dominant theatrical agency in Australia. On 18 March the *Canberra Times* declared it 'Top Entertainment', praising the music and strong individual performances. By this time, John had taken over negotiations for Albert. He already had engaged with Coronet Records, which had also sent a representative to see the show. On 18 March, he wrote to the Little Theatre and the Princess Theatre in Melbourne, enclosing copies of the review to pitch the show's success, and in one he declared: 'There is a very good chance of this hitting the Melbourne and Sydney stage, and at least getting to records.'

Ernest Lashmar, from Chappell & Co. Ltd Sydney sheet music company, had attended the show and entered an agreement to publish a selection of lyrics and sheet music of the songs from the musical. Coronet Records later agreed to release a record of the songs. John hoped to interest J. C. Williamson to take up production of the show and informed him of the audience's extraordinary reaction on opening night and that the music was to be published soon. For additional support, he wrote again to Coombs, this time enclosing a copy of the review of the first night of 'The Girl'. He told him of its success with Chappell and Coronet but that he was concerned that J. C. Williamson, although interested, generally only took on tried-and-tested overseas productions. He wrote: 'For these reasons I am very keen you should see it as soon as possible. It is Australian in theme and in authorship and something the Trust might like very much.' He went on to explain:

> J.C. Williamson want 'The Sentimental Bloke', also by Albert Arlen, but I feel they should not be able to pick on one thing and sit on others, and again it is something which the Trust might want to promote. It is ready for production, and while you are here Albert Arlen could tell you more about it.[6]

6 Arlen and Brown papers, NLA, MS 6311, box 15, file 72, letter 18 March 1960.

Coombs was about to leave for the USA. However, he had a staff member of the trust office attend the production, who reported on it favourably.[7]

The show ran for seven weeks, breaking previous box office records for the Canberra Repertory Society. The theatre was booked out. Grandfather Jack accompanied John and Cecily to a Sunday showing. People who could not get seats sat in their cars in the parking lot to hear the music. Radio 2CA broadcast it on the night of 21 May 1960. As successful as it was, Albert's royalties of 10 per cent of gross seat sales saw a cheque in his hand of only £112 19s 6d. At least John's calculations saw ends meet and the Repertory Society profited. But he wanted to do more for the Arlens' show. He had another idea. John made an informal approach to the Commonwealth Development Bank to borrow £2,000 to cover the costs of tendering for a Commonwealth bus and fitting it out, in order to take the show to the Snowy and country towns after its run had been completed in Canberra. John told his bank contact of the success of the show, the backing it had received and his vision. The response was encouraging and John formalised his request for a loan by letter of 23 March 1960:

> I have encouraged this idea and am acting as 'manager' to get it off the ground. I have done the same thing with books with an amazing success by taking a mobile through to the Snowy area – people are buying quantities of books and records who previously have never been in a book-shop. I think the reception of live shows if taken to the people would be the same.[8]

The same day he wrote to the manager, Commonwealth Bank Kingston, to seek £2,000 to finance his plan. He told of his proposal to tender for a Commonwealth bus for use as a travelling theatre to perform in country areas with a recruited team of about 10 permanent actors. His vision was to maintain a regular tour of a number of country centres with Canberra as its headquarters. He explained:

> Backing has been offered by publishers and others interested in stage productions; but the firm desires to retain its independence so that this new venture of taking productions to the people in non-metropolitan areas cannot be swamped by any organisation.[9]

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7 Coombs let John know by letter 12 May 1960. By this time the Reserve Bank of Australia had been created to take over the Commonwealth Bank's central banking functions and Coombs was appointed its governor.

8 Arlen and Brown papers, NLA, MS 6311, box 15, file 72.

9 Arlen and Brown papers, NLA, MS 6311, box 15, file 72, letter 23 March 1960.

Then John got bold. On 11 April, he wrote to Festival Theatre in Pitlochry, Perthshire, Scotland, asking for a copy of the plan of the theatre because, he explained, 'we plan now our own theatre and are attracted by the design of the Festival Theatre'. Then, on 18 May 1960, he wrote to the Premier of New South Wales suggesting that Albert Arlen be asked to write and to produce a musical especially for the occasion of the opening of the Opera House on Sydney's harbour front. As to this, he received a reply on 27 May 1960 stating that his proposal would be given 'careful consideration', but nothing came of the initiative.

Next came the time for John to get 'The Bloke' on the stage. The Repertory Society board had previously procrastinated about staging it, debating the importance of box office takings for a lowbrow musical versus quality drama. When Albert's negotiations had broken down, he accepted another failure with 'The Bloke'. John took up the challenge. He would get the show on the road without the Repertory's support. Soon after the successful run of 'The Girl' ended, as Nancy told it:

> John Burton did an amazing thing. He came to my desk in his Green Square Book shop and placed before me a Commonwealth Bank book in the name of Albert Arlen Australian Productions with a credit of one hundred pounds saying 'I am now going to ring up Kent Hughes and book the Albert Hall for a year hence. … You have got to produce *The Sentimental Bloke*, and this will give it a start'.[10]

Nancy picked up the passbook, looked John in the eye and said she accepted it, 'but only as a loan'.[11]

On 16 June 1960, John wrote to the Commonwealth's ACT Services Branch and requested a booking of the Albert Hall in the new year. On 29 June he received a reply informing him that 7 to 11 March inclusive had been allocated for the production of *The Sentimental Bloke*. The Arlens' world changed. Albert resurrected his music and Nancy and Lloyd Thomson finalised the lyrics, written to C. J. Dennis's *The Songs of a Sentimental Bloke*. Nancy started to assemble an amateur cast, created and played the role of Rose, and produced the play. Albert was musical

10 Brown Arlen, *The Black Sheep of the Brown Family*.

11 Arlen and Brown papers, NLA, MS 6311, box 15, file 73, addition 6/12/99, 'The sentimental Bloke Musical Play', compiled from the diaries of Albert Arlen, by Nancy Brown. The memoir tells the history of getting the shows on stage. See also MS 6311, 'Draft of Arlen's contribution to "The world of the Sentimental Bloke"', 1976.

director and main pianist, and was accompanied by a drummer and percussionist. The Bloke's girl Doreen was played by Constance Vayne, a secretary in the Department of Defence with acting qualifications and experience. Hugh Brophy, also experienced, played Mr Smithers (the Stror-'at-Coot) and the Burton's friend and past farm-help Don Kelly, whose singing in the shower at Weetangera had entranced Cecily, played Charlie Skewes (Man of uncertain occupation). I loved the fact that my school geography teacher, Paul Kelly (no relation to our friend Don), was to play Fred, and to discover that he was a talented dancer. Dark, classically handsome Douglas Skinner played Ginger Mick, the 'Rabbitoh' man.[12] Ginger Mick's wheelbarrow prop was sourced from Queanbeyan, had 100-year-old wheels and was filled with real, stuffed rabbits. The last to be cast was Bill, 'the Bloke'. Blond and good looking, with just the right larrikin smile and experience to play the role was Edwin Ride, a young diplomat who worked in the Department of External Affairs, which John used to head.

The initial £100 John lent the Arlens paid for the printing of tickets and programs. The Arlens arranged a £400 credit through family connections for material from Georges, a Canberra fabric store, for costumes. A breakthrough came. The *Australian Women's Weekly* was persuaded to send a reporter to attend rehearsals, held in an old converted army hut, in the first week of March 1961, just before it opened. It produced a gushing two-page story written by Patricia Kent, 'I dips me Lid', with lavish photos. It gave the show cover-page publicity: '*The Sentimental Bloke*... a new Australiana musical', accompanied by a photograph captioned: 'In all their wedding finery Edwin Ride, our Bill, and Constance Vane, our Doreen!' Kent's article talked about the musical being based on C. J. Dennis's poem and how the 'coves and coots and sheilas who crowd the page of the poems sprang into vivid life'.[13]

Opening night, 7 March and grandfather Jack's birthday, saw a packed house. Our whole family attended. I was aged 14 then and I noted in my diary that I wore my new middy heels. Making the occasion more special was the attendance of the Commonwealth administrator and his wife, Sir Dallas and Lady Brookes, who I knew were intending to entertain a bus load of Telopea Park students including me and 'billets' visiting

12 The Rabbitoh was a hawker who captured and skinned rabbits and took them in a barrow to sell the meat at markets, shouting 'rabbit-oh' to attract buyers.

13 *Australian Women's Weekly,* 8 March 1961, cover page and story, 3.

from King Island, over a 'whacko arvo tea' at Government House the coming May. Harold and Zara Holt were also at the opening. Bowden, J. C. Williamson's representative, attended and sent a glowing report to the company's Melbourne directors, Sir Frank Tait and John McCallum, both of whom travelled to Canberra to see it on closing night.

**Cover of 'The Bloke' music sheet.**
Source: Pamela's piano piece collection.

**Cover of 'The Girl' music sheet.**
Source: Pamela's piano piece collection.

The box office was sold out on closing night, and Tait and McCallum had to sit in the aisle.[14] It was worth making room for them. McCallum was impressed. He decided that J. C. Williamson would present the musical for a six-week season at the Comedy Theatre in Melbourne.

14 Edwin Ride, *I Dips Me Lid: Diplomatic Memories* (Palmwoods, Qld: E. Ride, 1991), 72.

Lashmar also attended on the closing night and Chappells Australia took up the publishing rights of the music lyrics and scores for 'The Bloke', too. John's Green Square shop sold the sheet music, of course.

The success of the production was an occasion to celebrate. Box office takings covered all debts, including the costume fabric and hall hire, and John, in charge of distributing the profits, decided that there was enough left over for each of the players and others involved to receive a small bonus. On Thursday 16 March, John held a party for *The Sentimental Bloke* cast at our Hobart Avenue home. The troupe crowded into our living and dining rooms and danced and sang in a rowdy celebration. The show was on the road.

McCallum urged Edwin Ride to forsake his diplomatic career and take up professional acting. He agonised over the decision, but agreed to do the Melbourne season, with options for renewal if the show was a success.[15] *The Sentimental Bloke* opened on 4 November 1961 at the Comedy Theatre in Melbourne. John and I flew from Canberra to attend one of the performances and Meredith, studying at the time in Melbourne, joined us. It received brilliant reviews and ran for five months in Melbourne. It went on to run for three weeks in Adelaide, a scheduled two weeks in Brisbane was extended to nine weeks, and then it was staged at Sydney's Theatre Royal for four months – over a year in all in Australia. It went to New Zealand for a six-week tour. The play grossed over £250,000 at the box office. It became one of the most successful Australian musicals of the twentieth century.

A special recording of the music made by the ABC was played all over the world, and its 1976 television production won it new nationwide acclaim. The show was turned into a ballet by others and the Australian Ballet first staged it in Australia in 1985 and subsequently on tour in the Soviet Union. Arlen's success in Australia was recognised in 1991 when he was awarded an Order of Australia in recognition of his services to music and the performing arts.

15 Ride, *I Dips Me Lid*, 69–70.

# 32

# Turmoil

By January 1961, John realised that he was in trouble; he felt he was losing Cecily. He told her that he really did love her. He tried hard to show it. Cecily was not convinced. She thought that his practical efforts lacked any renewed emotional connection.[1] Our household became tense and turbulent. John did not want to lose our affection, but in a household of teenage girls he found it hard to accept our interest in make-up, fashion and boys, and he made inept and sometimes offensive remarks. He continued to expect more of Meredith than he did of Clare and me. On seeing Meredith wearing a new lipstick once, he said, 'What have you got that scotch tape on for?' He had no sense of the impact of his reproof on her self-esteem.

John felt his loss of control over us. Cecily was more lenient and more trusting of Clare and me. John did not like me going on car trips to country towns for swimming carnivals. Clare had a festering resentment of John and rows broke out in the house with each of us and, when John did not get his way, he just stopped talking to us. At age 14 I wrote in my diary – and not for the first time – words to the effect of 'Dad not talking. Wish the whole family could get on together'.

Cecily was still supportive of John and his work. During the day she helped out at the shop. On occasion she would open up the Kingston shop, and I would go with her before school when I could. In her spare time, Cecily

1 The sources for Cecily's thoughts and feelings in this chapter where not otherwise referenced are a compilation of Cecily's private journals, my diaries, personal communications with Cecily over the years and our own recollections.

worked diligently on John's 'peace theory' manuscript.[2] She stayed up late at night because John had said he had a deadline to meet, though in retrospect she believed it was self-imposed. She would burst her guts to get it done for him. Cecily was a skilled editor, and John's writing expression left a lot to be desired. He made generalisations that she questioned and, after understanding better what he was trying to say, she recast it to better express his ideas. John accepted and used most of the suggestions she made, but he failed to express his appreciation. Rather, he got annoyed at her questioning of the assumptions on which he based his theories, or pointing out leaps in logic and instances of poor expression. She was an excellent copyeditor but, because of her writing skills and her ability to grasp complex issues, she was not prepared to merely edit without critiquing the substance of his work. The published work benefited from her structural and other changes; however, while he formally credited Robert Parker in the book's Acknowledgements, he did not mention Cecily.

With happiness, I noted in my diary on Monday 24 April 1961 that flowers had arrived for Cecily from John to celebrate their wedding anniversary: 'Fabulous – a real big bouquet'. Then again, how disappointed I was on 9 November 1961, Sabne's birthday: 'Dad bought an 11/6 chocolate heart for Sabne, and said it was from me.' He had not yet let go of Sabne.

There was talk about moving to another house. The move was on and then off and then John fell into a no-talking mood – that is, until Cecily agreed to buy the house he had chosen. It was close to where we lived, modern and much larger than the one we had, with a self-contained flat. It had enough bedrooms to allow for John and Cecily to have their own, which ultimately occurred, and separate rooms for Meredith and Clare when they were home from university, one being large enough for them to share in the event that grandfather came to stay. John's choice of home was inexplicable to Cecily; it had more bedrooms and bathrooms than we needed. John wanted a fresh start or he was simply restless. He seemed to think that a new house would win back Cecily's heart. It also had a large undeveloped garden that he could cultivate and grow vegetables in, akin to the 'shovelling shit' on the farm that he found therapeutic for working on ideas in his head. Reverting to form, John bought Cecily a new car and a refrigerator without consulting her about either as to what she might like. He expected her to be overwhelmed and grateful. Instead, she said:

2 John's *Peace Theory: Preconditions of Disarmament* was published in 1962 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf).

'Why didn't you ask me about it, what sort [of car or fridge] I would like?' John was hurt. He had not learned from her reaction 10 years earlier when he had presented us all with ponies without prior discussion.

When my parents told me that they had decided to buy a new house after all, I shrugged it off. I told my diary, 'I'm not going to bother to keep up – I don't know what will happen'. Then, on the morning of 12 August 1961, I was asked to clear out all my cupboards before I left for my basketball match because we were moving. Grandfather, who had been staying with us, returned to Sydney that day. I came home after basketball that afternoon to find the house empty; all the furniture had gone and no one was home. Clare was in Sydney and Meredith was in Melbourne, both at university. I found it an eerie experience as a young teen, until one or other of my parents returned to the house to complete the move. There had been so much talk of moving I had simply not wanted to know about it. By nightfall I was in my new room surrounded by my things in our new home at 5 Talbot Street, Forrest.

The new house did not 'fix things' between Cecily and John. Family arguments erupted. Within a few weeks, John, Cecily and I were all quarrelling. One morning Cecily was crying while driving me to school. Tears in front of us were rare, given Cecily's self-control and ability to always put our interests ahead of her own. But Cecily and John's arguments became constant and open. When Clare came home to an unhappy house for the holidays, she became very unhappy. She thought the family did not want her and that she was out of place. She and I argued and, together with Cecily, we were in tears for large parts of many days. Sometimes a family drive at the end of the day would help everyone 'feel better' for a while. Meredith returned home before Christmas too. She was doing well at university despite the interruption to her second year of studies when she had suffered a mental breakdown. It pleased John that she was following his lead, studying and excelling in economics. Accompanied by a flattering photograph two days before Christmas 1960, the *Canberra Times* wrote about '20 year old Meredith Burton' adding 'more lustre to the family record of academic distinction'. By the time she completed her first-class honours degree in 1962, she had been awarded four Exhibitions for first place in her subjects.

During this time, Robert and John maintained their relationship as colleagues. Throughout 1961, John was working on a paper on peace initiatives with Robert, John Crawford, Patrick Fitzgerald and Manning

Clark.[3] It involved him liaising closely with Parker, to whom John left its final drafting. They completed the document by the end of the year. On Christmas Day 1961, John wrote to the *New Statesman* newspaper editor, Norman MacKenzie, requesting it be published. 'It is Christmas Day – so greetings to you and Jeanne and family', he commenced before explaining the genesis of the paper and discussion it contained on the world situation and where it should be heading.[4]

Cecily and John should not have been together at this time. John did not break with Sabne as demonstrated by his gift to her of a chocolate heart, and what intimacies might have been occurring at this time between Cecily and Robert is a matter of speculation. John and Cecily attempted to keep their relationship alive, possibly because I still had another year of high school to complete. While John's father was in the house, everyone was circumspect – except Clare. On New Year's Day 1962, Clare declared that she would not come home until 'mum and dad solved their problems'. I thought that unfair of her. I had had to put up with it the whole time, so why should she not?

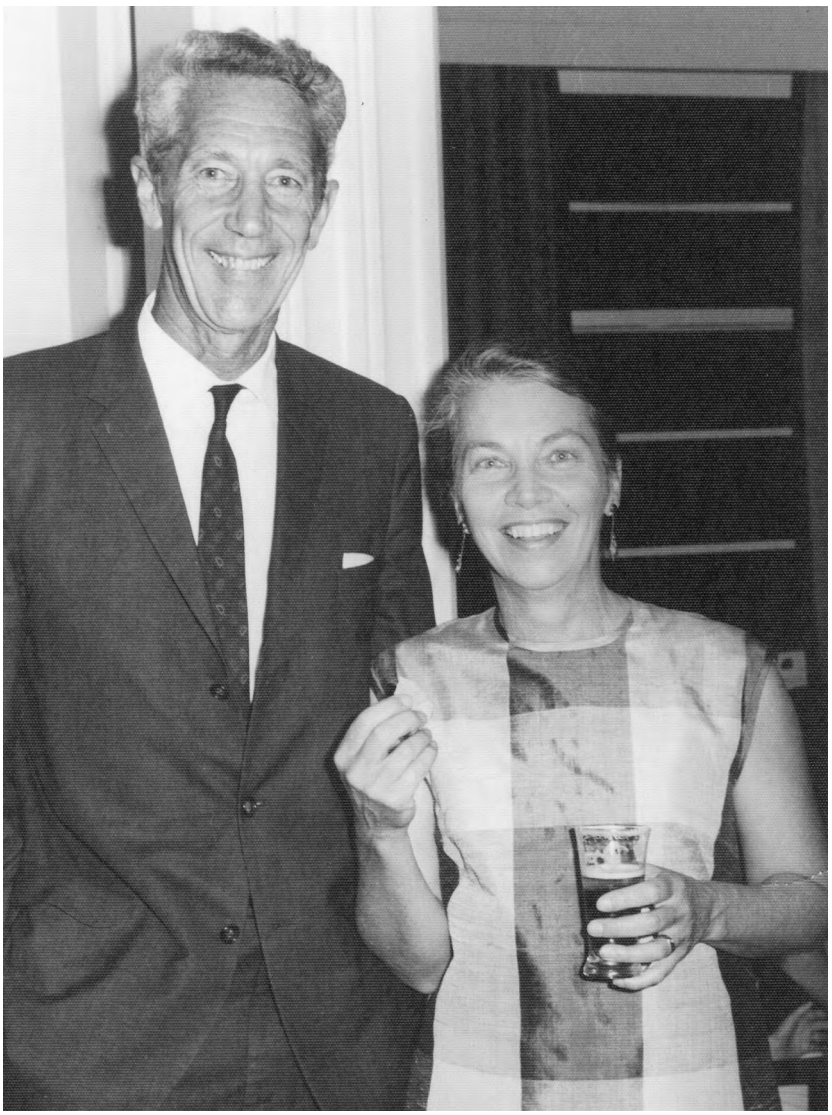
Meredith and I have now uncovered letters that tell us that, by June 1962, Robert and Cecily were in love and had become lovers. Robert's small motor vehicle played its part, as uncomfortable as it must have been, given that Robert was 6 feet 2 inches, a foot taller than Cecily! The lovers' letters were written in June and July 1962 when Robert was working in the Territory of Papua and New Guinea on administrative matters concerning the territory's independence. They openly discussed their love, the meaning of their relationship and, significantly, family commitments that prevented them from being together. They explored what they had in common. They were both interested in poetry, philosophy and the works of Goethe. While not poetically prolific like Cecily, she was heartened to learn that Robert had written a poem in 1950, 'Cool Change', to express his feelings. She told him how much she loved and missed him. Yet, it seems that Cecily was not sure whether she did or did not love Robert at this stage. In one letter, she wrote:

> it haunts me that I said to you before you left that I was not in love with you – or words to that effect. I am not even sure that it is true … Never in my life have I had such a beautiful satisfying

3 'East–West Conflict – What is the Fight About?', R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200, box 46, file 189.

4 Copy letter held Burton family file.

and profoundly moving relationship as with you – nor even approaching it. If this is not being in love in the *best* sense of the words, then nothing is.[5]



**Robert Parker and Cecily, Canberra, 1966.**
Source: Family collection.

5 R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200 Restricted, box 20, file 87, 'Family corr. Burton, Cecily Margaret, 1962'.

Cecily was not the outgoing extrovert as was Robert's creative artist wife, Nancy Parker. Cecily was quieter and appeared to be more acquiescent. However, from the beginning, it seems Cecily needed to analyse and articulate her feelings and have Robert engage in understanding her. She told him about her 'theme of oneness', believing, hoping, that Robert would understand it – and her – at a deep philosophical level:

> I have this passionate urge to save humanity and will not be satisfied until I do something beyond my personal life. I used to think my role was to serve the world through John, and my own work has come about by trying to understand why that did not succeed. Love, intelligence, reason, passionate ideals, self-sacrifice – all the virtues welded together are as nothing when there is a lack of understanding (comprehension not sympathy). It is like trying to work an atomic reactor without an elementary knowledge of physics. We just don't know the principles involved in human relationships.[6]

On a separate piece of paper she wrote a poem:

> You are a tall straight tree my beloved.
> The sun is your love for others,
> The earth is their love for you,
> Your work is the air about you,
> The rain is your rest and sleep.
> I am but the gentle breeze and violent storm.
> To tell you there is more than these.

What did Robert make of Cecily's letters containing her openly expressed doubt about whether she was in love with him accompanied by a mix of intimacy and heavy philosophic content? Wanting Robert to understand her childhood origins of troubled feelings, Cecily reverted to her lifelong fascination with the Hans Christian Andersen story of Kai and Gerda and the 'Ice Queen'. She might have been presumptuous in discussing at this stage how she and Robert might fulfil each other's needs, for Robert replied in practical terms. He aired his concern about putting their love ahead of his own family commitments:

> If you and I were free, or became so honourably (to the others we're now committed to) I would, with your consent, feel it very right to make a new start in any capacity which seemed best – including

6 R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200 Restricted, box 20, file 87, 'Burton, Cecily Margaret, 1962', reply dated 'Thursday' to Robert's letter of 15 June 1962.

> taking a different or lower-paid job and living here … In practice things may not be quite like this. We have our other commitments which may continue. I cannot jeopardise the support of my family. I shall probably have to continue in Canberra.[7]

Only weeks later, in July 1962, Cecily wrote to Robert telling him that she had decided to give John's and her marriage another go – that is, she wanted an end to their affair for the time. Had Robert's response caused Cecily to feel insecure?

At home, I knew John was unhappy. I understood that he was suffering back pain, or so Cecily explained, and my diary notes record that he was having his 'neck stretched again' in mid-June. On 23 June 1962 I noted: 'Dad not good – also mum and he seem to be "discussing" quite a lot.' And discussing they were. Cecily told John about the development of her relationship with Robert. It was then that she confessed to him about her affair with Raju in Ceylon. It brought a strong reaction. He wanted her back, that is, to be with him, 'immediately, completely and unconditionally', he said. Her affair with Raju gave him the high moral ground. Cecily, perhaps now realising that she could not rely on Robert being there for her if she left John, felt that she had no choice but to give the marriage another go. Cecily told Robert: 'If at the end of twelve months or so I feel I can't live with him he will agree to let me go. He is immensely generous.'[8] Nevertheless, Cecily was torn. In the same letter, she told Robert that if he wanted to see her on his return, she would ask John to agree because 'I feel I cannot adjust myself to John's suggestion unless I know how you are'.

This was a lot for Robert to absorb in one letter, but Cecily, having broken off their affair, asked Robert to tell Nancy about them, if possible. 'Perhaps I am hoping it will give her as much understanding as it has given John,' she wrote. Then, she wrote about how wonderful a lover Robert was: 'with you I am at peace: your very urgency delights me'. Confiding further in Robert, Cecily told him that if she found she could live with John, it was because Robert had taught her to tell the truth; 'from you I know what a real relationship can be', she told him. 'I know what I have to do for the next sixteen months. Little by little I have to try to build up a

7 R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200 Restricted, box 20, file 87, 'Burton, Cecily Margaret, 1962', undated, June 'Saturday'.

8 R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200 Restricted, box 20, file 87, 'Burton, Cecily Margaret, 1962'.

truthful relationship with John.'[9] Her letters to Robert did not cease. One of several more she wrote to Robert over the next few months was about the necessity of them leading separate lives. In another, she said:

> My relationship with John has become so much more real, though by no means always happy, that I understand I must put aside all thoughts of deciding anything at the end of next year. John is essentially a simple soul and a noble one and I cannot give him anything less than complete loyalty now …[10]

I was now 16 and, knowing nothing about Cecily's developing and then thwarted romance, I noticed that the household became somewhat frenetic. On 29 July, for example, Cecily returned from a trip to Melbourne, probably from visiting Meredith at university there, just as John left for a two-month trip to Indonesia undertaking research for work he was doing at ANU. 'What a household!' was how I summed it up. Cecily ceased her university job to take up a job offer to work as an administrative assistant at the newly formed Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies. Robert returned to ANU at about the same time, which meant she and Robert would avoid seeing each other at faculty's morning tea gatherings in the building at ANU where John was also now working. Professor Bill Stanner, whom Cecily had known since her undergraduate days, had, she said later, been kind and foolish enough to offer her a job and she had foolishly accepted, which suggests her change of work may have been motivated by her commitment not to see Robert.

In September 1962, I came down with glandular fever and, being confined to bed for several weeks, it had a uniting effect on the family. John and Cecily cooperated in care arrangements and the house came alive with visitors, family friends, as well as my schoolfriends who streamed in and out of the house at any hour. Then, one evening that month, John and Cecily went to dinner at Robert and Nancy's house. John returned without Cecily at around 9:30 pm and I was still awake. He told me that Cecily wanted to stay on because 'she is enjoying herself'. Cecily came home just after midnight. I suppose I worked out, as John would have known, that Robert drove her home, presumably while Nancy did the dishes or had retired to bed. John was, again, on the back foot. We now know

9 R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200 Restricted, box 20, file 87, 'Burton, Cecily Margaret, 1962', undated.

10 R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200 Restricted, box 20, file 87, 'Burton, Cecily Margaret, 1962', undated.

from letters between Nancy and Robert written in mid-1962 that Nancy acknowledged her marriage to Robert was at an end.[11] Years later, in 1971, Nancy would marry Professor Geoffrey Sawer, whose wife Mamie had died two years earlier, and Nancy would move in to live with him in the Sawer family house, a few houses along in the same street as hers and Robert's family home. The Parkers' two youngest children, Trina and Quentin, attended my school, although they were younger than me and in lower grades. The Sawers' daughter, Elizabeth, was my friend and classmate. The three families knew each other well. Times 'were a changin', and this form of 'wife and husband' musical chairs became a feature of Canberra's late 1960s and 1970s academic culture. We grew up accepting that the parents of friends of ours could become each other's step-parents!

11 R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200, file 112, 'Nancy Parker, Part 1'.

# 33

# The breakup

In May 1962, in John's position as visiting fellow in the Research School of Pacific Studies, ANU, the Rockefeller Foundation of New York awarded him a grant to study Asian and African policies of neutralism and non-alignment.[1] The funding covered the cost of his travels in July of that year to Djakarta, Kuala Lumpur, Cairo, Belgrade and the UN headquarters in New York. It was a great opportunity. But *The Bulletin* mocked:

> Dr Burton, who thinks that Australia should not, for example, be aligned with the U. S. in Asia is now in the odd position of accepting American gold – provided by ultra capitalist sources like the Rockefellers – to prove, presumably, just that point.[2]

Others attempted to thwart the grant. Journalist Alan Reid tried again to cause harm to John's career and contacted the American Embassy to complain about John's grant. According to an ASIO report of 22 May 1962, embassy officials said they could do nothing, having no connection with the Rockefeller Foundation.[3] Professor Richard Walker of the University of South Carolina, who had visited Australia the previous year, tried to intervene. In a letter of 30 May 1962 to the Rockefeller Foundation (a copy of which we have obtained), Walker argued: 'Since [Burton] was thrown out of the Foreign Office his public statements hardly qualify him as a scholar, do they?' By letter of 3 August 1962,

1 *Canberra Times,* 19 May 1962, 2, and 14 November 1962, 3.
2 'Dr Burton's Neutralism', *Woroni* (ANU student newspaper), 1 June 1962, 1.
3 NAA: A6119, 834, Dr John Wear Burton vol. 7.

the foundation replied making short shrift of Walker's complaint assuring him that Burton's qualifications, references and academic standing had been thoroughly investigated.[4]

The atmosphere in the Research School at ANU was unpleasant. John felt his political and economic philosophy was misunderstood, that he had been unfairly treated in public life and, as a consequence, his work was not adequately acknowledged by his university colleagues. Particularly hostile to John's view was Professor J. D. B. Miller in the Department of International Relations. Richard Krygier, an anti-communist publisher, journalist and founder of *Quadrant* magazine with strong connections to the Committee for Cultural Freedom, wrote that one of Miller's first acts as head of department was 'to terminate the fellowship of Dr John Burton', because he had been head of External Affairs under Evatt. Krygier believed that Miller 'will want to have people who are both good scholars and who are committed to the free world'.[5] Krygier urged that every assistance be given to Miller in this endeavour.

John's work might not have been applauded by his peers at ANU, but what he might contribute to peace theories was not lost on international scholars. In June 1963, at the close of Cecily and John's trial reconciliation period, John was offered a permanent position at University College, London (UCL) as Reader of International Relations. He took up the offer and invited Cecily to come with him. He possibly knew she would not but naively hoped she would. After all, in taking up the appointment he was leaving Sabne too, it being Cecily he wanted to have beside him. Cecily declined. She had been prepared to give their relationship another go but moving overseas was not what she had in mind. John insisted thereafter that it was her decision to leave the marriage.

John seemed genuinely upset that Cecily would not come with him. He did not give up attempts to persuade her. He flew first to the USA and on arriving in New York City he discovered that marriage counselling services were offered there. In a letter to Cecily he said that he was impressed with 'developments in the science of marriage which is now not phoney-stuff'.[6]

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4 Copies of the correspondence held on Burton family file. Letters sourced from university archives in Canberra and Melbourne indicate that a Rockefeller family member met John and Cecily over dinner at Manning Clark's home, and that archival material confirms that John's proposal – to work on peace in the Asian region and to undertake a study of neutralism in Africa – was successful on its merits.

5 Letter 28 February 1963, Humphrey McQueen, 'Quadrant and the CIA [1977]', chapter 17 in *Gallipoli to Petrov: Arguing with Australian History* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1984), 190.

6 Undated, but received by Cecily on 21 June 1963, Cecily family file. The following correspondence unless otherwise indicated, took place in June 1963 and is held on the Cecily family file.

He talked about people who handle 'people like us' and suggested Cecily might join him seeking the help of professionals. If counselling between them was successful, he confidently said, 'it is not beyond belief' that Bob and Nancy, and Max and Fran could also benefit. In his view, if he and Cecily did not succeed, the others 'have no hope'. He pleaded with her that it was too important for her not to try. Cecily was certain in her reply. She appreciated his feelings but her answer was 'no'. She wrote, 'I have committed myself to you completely and utterly for 25 years, and as that did not work I do not believe anything else will. I have given everything, John, and simply have no more to give …'. John responded with: 'I am sorry to have to say it, but there is no one I love (and hate) but you.'

Changes to all of our lives were rapid. Cecily and I rattled around for a while in the large house. Meredith, living away from home, had difficulty understanding what was happening. In January 1963, she had married Clive Edwards, an economist she had met at university. In May that year, they travelled to Kuala Lumpur, Malaya, where Clive undertook field work for his PhD on Malaya's public finances. In June, Meredith was surprised to receive a letter from John just before he left 'on his great adventures'. In a letter, she asked him whether Cecily and Pam would follow him to London. His reply was unclear.

By July, John's exploration of the possibility of Cecily joining him came to an end, however. Cecily wrote: 'I cannot live with you, I do not want to, and I do not "want to want to." I find living with you painful and degrading and destructive of happiness all around us. So I intend to love you from a distance.'[7] The tone of the exchange deteriorated sharply as recriminations about the past crept in. John's letters took on a harsh, if not cruel, tone. He revisited Cecily's affair with Raju in Ceylon believing in hindsight that she had no longer loved him:

> since Ceylon you have not been a free person within yourself. The hand pats, the looks across the room were always an embarrassment because they were not affection but an inhibited attempt to display it. Your rejection of me, more than rejection but constant attack, after Ceylon was an attempt to lay at my door what you had done and hidden from me.[8]

7 Letter 6 July 1963, Cecily family file. The quoted extracts from letters between Cecily and John in this chapter where not referenced are from letters written in 1963 and are held on the Cecily family file.
8 Undated letter, written late July or early August 1963.

He indulged in a blame game. He suggested that, if Cecily had told him about the affair at the time, there would have been less tension between them and that 'Meredith would not have had a break-down; Clare would not be the person she is – and we would have lived a full life … It is you, you cannot live with'.

Cecily dutifully kept John informed of Clare's and my various activities, and John wrote often to each of us. Cecily started to work on bettering her own life. Without John, she had fewer people to feel responsible for. Grandfather Jack, whose primary residence was with us from the time we moved into Talbot Street, returned to John's oldest sister's home in Sydney. But there was Rosalie, a young friend of mine, still boarding with us until the end of the school year. Rosalie's family were farmers in country New South Wales. John invited her parents to send her to us in Canberra, so that she could better her education by going to my school, Telopea Park High. He believed that without good education her life would be relegated to being a farmer's wife, while her brothers would inherit property to farm. I feel sure he was also motivated by wanting to provide me with a young companion who would be a positive moral influence, at a time when my life was in turmoil. Cecily had also taken under her wing a young woman, Billie, who was a friend of Clare's who had some mental health issues. She stayed with us periodically. Then there was Sabne. Distressed at John's departure, Sabne stayed in touch. She had not been well and was hospitalised in August that year. Cecily visited her and cared about what might happen to her too, but, fortunately, had no responsibility for her.

Of importance was 'Doc' Evatt, who we all cared about. Just after John left Australia in mid-1963, Evatt and his wife Mary Alice moved into 10 Hobart Avenue, which had an adjoining back fence to our house. Evatt was ill and frail, and Cecily visited him in order to give John updates on his wellbeing. She braced herself for the pain she expected on her first visit, but she reported: 'His soul is gone but his face looks rather fine.'[9] Evatt had been appointed Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of New South Wales in February 1960 and had retired in 1962 because of ill health. He had visited us in Talbot Street on occasion the previous year.[10] According to Mary Alice, the Evatts' choice of a residence near ours was deliberate; he wanted to be near John for companionship. But John had gone.

9 Letter 20 July 1963, Cecily family file.

10 My diary entry of 10 February 1962, 'Dr Evatt came at lunch time (per usual)'.

The Evatts' house has its own story. Dr Ralph Reader, founder of the National Heart Foundation of Australia among other achievements, lived there with his family until they moved into our family's much-loved former mansion and farm, 'Melrose Valley' at Tuggeranong. Years later, former deputy prime minister Tim Fischer moved into 10 Hobart Avenue and, in 2002, he told me that on realising it was a former home of Doc Evatt, he moved out again!

Cecily reported to John following a visit to Evatt and Mary Alice on 28 July 1963:

> Dr Evatt is practically locked in doors – perhaps he will be allowed out when the weather is better, but it may be he would wander off. It is pathetic and distressing to Mrs Evatt to lock and unlock the doors. The nurse follows him everywhere – what a terrible job! He talks inconsequentially as he often did, but now I suppose he can't talk otherwise. I'd like to have seen more of him, but he did not stay in the room. I don't know if the nurse is encouraged to remove him – it seems rather as though he is very restless – just potters around, and she follows. The first thing he said to me was that my eyes were a different colour. His back is bowed, and he is thin, but not nearly as frail as I had expected. Mrs E hasn't changed a scrap, but I find her much easier to talk to, though not easier to stop. I find everybody easier to talk to now.[11]

Cecily's last sentence reflects the relief she felt in a house without John. I hopped over the back fence too, to visit my father's old friend. As a child, I had found him gruff at times, but I knew him to be kindly and he had given me presents of books that I treasured. It was not easy to absorb how he looked now – sitting in a wheelchair, propped up by pillows, his legs covered by a thick rug. He could not lie down for fear of contracting pneumonia. He was about six-and-a-half stone and not aware of my presence. Evatt survived in this fragile state for another two years.

Cecily still had Clare and me to worry about. Meredith was no longer a concern. Within the first week or so of arriving in Kuala Lumpur in 1963, Tom Critchley, the Australian high commissioner, assisted Meredith in obtaining a teaching position at the University of Malaya. She needed a job to help support Clive while he was a research scholar, and her teaching position in the fields of monetary and development economics provided

11 Cecily family file.

her with the start to her acclaimed academic and public service career. Clare, having followed Cecily's footsteps and majored in anthropology and psychology, was completing her honours degree while I was still at school undertaking my leaving certificate. What I would do then, and where I would live, was the subject of correspondence between John and Cecily – and Meredith from Malaya trying to get them to sort something out.

Meredith questioned Cecily as to why she did not intend to join, or at least visit, John in London and take me with her after I finished school at the end of the year. 'You see, I cannot understand how you can accept to be parted for long – even these six months', she wrote on 12 July 1963, and:

> Are you waiting, mum, till dad makes up his mind and then would you definitely go? Why is it best that you stay behind? … Maybe I am still in the young married days and couldn't conceive of such a break. But do let me in on everything or reassure me that I have been told all – please.[12]

Receiving another letter from John, Meredith was not convinced that he was happy in London without Cecily. At the end of July, she wrote to Cecily again: 'It was the superficial happiness expressed in dad's letters that really began us thinking – believe it or not … He appears to us that [he] is not as happy as he makes out.' John reached out to Meredith to ask whether I might spend a few weeks with her and Clive in Malaya at the end of the year, it being his hope that I would travel on to the UK and attend university there. No one banked on my poor results, or at least in some subjects that had to be passed for matriculation purposes. A custody wrangle – of a sort – broke out between John and Cecily over where I should live. Their conflicting priorities came to the surface: Cecily was concerned with my emotional wellbeing, and John with my education and future in mind. John wanted me to join him, and Cecily knew that if I went to university in the UK, I might never return. Cecily thought it in my best interests that I remain in Australia with the rest of my family and my many friends. Meredith counselled that in the circumstances neither Cecily nor John should determine this for me. I was, after all, 17. It was an uncomfortable situation for Meredith to be in. Cecily wrote explaining what she could about her and John's relationship, but by this

12 The quoted letters between Meredith and her parents, unless otherwise indicated, are held on the Cecily family file.

time Meredith preferred to 'let the matter drop'. She told our mother that when she received letters from our father, 'I feel a little unstable, so I'd rather not go into the whys or hows of the matter'.[13]

By the end of September, plans had solidified. John offered to pay for me to fly to London on completion of my schooling in mid-December, the plan being that I would stay with Meredith and Clive in Malaya for a week on my way. Cecily agreed on condition John offered a return airfare so that I could decide for myself where I wanted to live. Clare, who Meredith and I regarded as the most brilliant of us, graduated in arts from the University of Sydney with first-class honours in anthropology and was awarded the University Medal. She applied for and won a research position at the Tavistock Institute in London and decided to travel by boat to join us in the UK early the following year to take up the position.

Cecily was free to start her new life; free of children and free to explore her relationship with Robert. She was ready to emerge from John's shadow and live, love and work on her own terms. In October 1963, she found a small two-bedroom house in the suburb of Ainslie that she thought she could afford despite the house in Forrest not having been sold. Meredith was concerned at her apparent impetuousness, believing Cecily was in a confused state of mind. She, like I, was unaware that Cecily's friendship with Robert had developed into a relationship of intense love. Cecily was resolute and moved into her new home in early 1964.

Cecily's decision not to join John was the right one for her, personally and professionally. However, they would both have difficulty untwining themselves from each other. Cecily's inner turmoil prevented her from transferring her affection wholeheartedly from John to Robert. She wanted Robert to be a part of her new life, but she was not ready to fully let go of John. In November 1963, she told John:

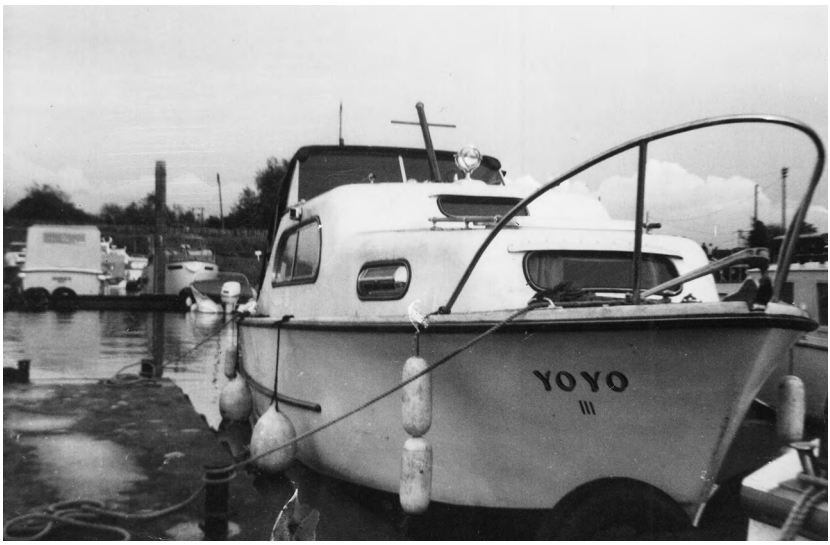
> One of the things I want out of life – perhaps it is what I want more than anything else – is to work out an honest relationship with you … it may lead to a final and respectful acceptance of differences, or it may not … But we are not finished with each other yet.[14]

13 Letter 21 August 1963, Cecily family file.
14 Letter 25 November 1963, Cecily family file.

She added that she was not suggesting that necessarily they should ever come together again, but that 'I don't know where it will lead'. John was confused by her mixed messages and protested that her statements were ambiguous. She replied that her position was quite clear. While parental concern for Clare and me gave Cecily and John reason to keep in touch, curiously, Cecily continued to air her thinking about their relationship. She told John that she had been reflecting over what she had said to him about their marriage and felt the need to clarify. 'I am distressed that I married you and find myself unable to keep my vows … I did not know myself well enough, or you either. But we have our wonderful children …' She went on to say that her worries would vanish if John found a woman who would love him. She did not consider the possibility that he might already have entered into another relationship about which Clare and I soon learned when we joined John in London.

In London, Clare and I observed for ourselves, not just the apparent success of John's academic career, but how quickly he had embraced and befriended his colleagues and their families in London – and a young Australian friend, Leone Gold. John was taken with Leone: her olive sun-freckled skin, dark short cropped hair, black eyes and infectious laugh. Leone doted on John, his charm, his looks, his politics and his brain; and she stood up to him and, in my observation, won any debate on any topic outside his field. Australian born, Leone had come to London to make a new life, having become disillusioned with Australian politics and her own family relations. She was a brilliant mathematician, fluent in French, and had a large circle of interesting friends and associates. Closer to my age than John's, he introduced her to me as a friend who might help me settle into London. I was easily won over because she had a piano in her flat that I could loudly and repeatedly bash out the few classical pieces I could play by heart, such as Grieg's Piano Concerto in A minor, and Tchaikovsky's Piano Concertos 1 and 2, without people slamming doors on me. Somehow, Leone found someone to take me into a touring basketball team, she enrolled me in French and typing lessons and had a travel agent friend provide me with all sorts of European bus tours. She also introduced me to avocados, which I had never seen in Australia, and the true baked Jewish cheesecake to be found only at a Sunday market stall in Petticoat Lane. Jewish by birth and looks, she was a rationalist and not religious in belief.

**Leone Gold, Kent, UK, 1978.**
Source: Family collection.




**John's boat on the Thames, London, 1964.**
Source: Family collection.

John had made an interesting new life for himself, and I benefited from Leone accompanying us on a trip to France and Spain where her fluent French and extraordinary cultural knowledge enhanced both John's and my appreciation of art, architecture and all things European. Back in London, we spent many long summer evenings on the boat he had bought, *Yo Yo*, exploring the Thames and its canals and enjoying a different perspective of the city, sunsets, swimming alongside the boat and watching with fascination the operation of the canal locks to allow us to pass through. John flew the UN flag on *Yo Yo* until the authorities confronted him, read the riot act and ordered him to fly the British flag.

The trauma for me, however, was the charade that John and Leone were not in a relationship. As if I could not see or hear that Leone was staying overnight with John in his double bed in our small flat! Why did John not simply tell Cecily so that they might agree on a divorce and spare me and Clare the futile hope that our parents would reunite? He and Leone attended to every aspect of my physical wellbeing but failed dismally in understanding causes and effects of emotional scarring. It would not be until Cecily told John in early 1965 that she wanted a divorce in order to marry Robert that John would admit his commitment to Leone. These were the days of 'fault-based' divorce, and whichever spouse first desired to remarry necessarily accepted 'blame' as an adulterer in order to be divorced.

# 34

# Tugs of war of love and divorce

While Clare and I were in London throughout 1964, Cecily and Robert in Australia faced uncertainties about their relationship. Robert was conflicted; he wanted to be with Cecily, but he did not want to let Nancy and his children down, who were now all living in Canberra. Cecily, by letter in May 1964, suggested that Robert stand back, or 'stay away', until he found himself.[1] He had the opportunity to do so because he travelled a lot. Robert had headed the political science program in the Research School of Social Sciences, ANU, since 1962 and his work required him to spend quite a deal of time in New Guinea and elsewhere. But Cecily missed Robert and could not 'stand back' from Robert herself, despite her best intentions. When Robert had periods in Canberra that year, he visited and stayed over with Cecily when he could, officially residing at University House. When he was away, they corresponded. Cecily kept Robert informed of her activities, helped him with his writing and, in turn, he encouraged her interest in writing. A piece she wrote in March 1964 for a creative writing exercise illustrates her continuing introspection:

> I saw a picture in my mind last night … I saw something like an amoeba or jellyfish floating expanded and relaxed with its edges loose, its inside parts aimless and at rest. The creature was not entirely unaware, but the environment was congenial, and it seemed to be taking time off. Then suddenly, from somewhere, there was a threat. Immediately the animal was still, its boundaries took shape, its internal parts became ready to take action; it was

1 R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200 Restricted, box 20, file 88, 'Burton, Cecily Margaret 1964'.

> potentially, if not immediately, hostile. It was an organized creature then, a distinct individual ready to act as such; not just easy-going, floating, nondescript and apparently lifeless. Its preparation to defend itself made it more definite and meaningful; it was distinct from its environment. I thought as I saw this, that some people must have such a threat in order to recognize themselves – that they need it constantly, or they do not know who they are. They do not know where their boundaries are, or what their internal organization is unless they feel they are under attack; they must be on the defensive to know themselves.[2]

Cecily re-engaged with some former friends and admirers. Gerald Firth helped her with the garden of her new home and he joined her on some outings and they ate several times together. She hosted dinners and extended party invitations to Frank Chamberlain (Radio 2CA's 'Canberra on the line') and Manning Clark, who 'appeared from nowhere on the other end of the telephone last night' prompting her to invite him, she explained by letter to Robert. She had dinner with Coombs, about whom she wrote to Robert, 'he is down and unhappy – caught in a trap from which he can't escape', referring to his failing marriage and his unhappiness at home.[3] In a loving letter to Robert in August 1964, she wrote:

> I am really awfully dependent on you – I wish you were here. It is wonderful to feel dependent, and wonderful to feel I can trust you to turn to. I don't suppose I ever really trusted anyone before.[4]

Then followed more letters, heavy in content as Cecily pursued her need to be understood. Robert, unlike John, listened and really tried hard to understand, but his responses did not fully satisfy her.

Cecily's year of freedom and personal privacy came to an end when first Clare returned from the UK and then I came home before Christmas, to prepare myself for university.[5] On our return from abroad, both Clare and I assumed our right to move back 'home' – that is, into Cecily's tiny house that she had bought to start, what she hoped would be, a new life with Robert. The house was bursting at the seams with the two of us sharing a room and constantly arguing. Robert stayed overnight sometimes, but it was a miserable time for him and Cecily.

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2 Cecily family file.

3 R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200 Restricted, box 20, file 88, letter 30 July 1964.

4 R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200 Restricted, box 20, file 88, undated, July or August 1964.

5 From the UK John managed to cajole the Vice Chancellor of the ANU into providing me with provisional admission to enrol in a combined arts/law degree.

Over the Christmas holidays, Robert joined his wife and family at their holiday home to spend time with his children. Cecily looked forward to the New Year rolling in when troublesome Clare and I would move out and leave her in peace and, she hoped, Robert would make the break with Nancy and move in with her. Unfortunately, the New Year saw little improvement in Cecily's enjoyment of life. Clare and I, still living at home, were at each other's throats. Robert was again away, on study leave, and Cecily told him in a letter that Clare and I made her and each other 'very miserable'.[6] She later wrote a cheerier note to Robert in which she mentioned that I had gone off to Sydney and Clare had decided to look for a flat to live in. Cecily had managed to secure a room for me at Bruce Hall, a residential college for out-of-town ANU students, from the commencement of the 1965 first semester. I had, after all, just returned from my father's care in the UK. John agreed to pay for it. Clare secured research work and moved into shared rented accommodation. Cecily and Robert must have sighed with relief once we left her house.

By early 1965, Robert's domestic situation had crystallised and he and Nancy dealt with their situation amicably and efficiently. They decided that 'enough is enough'. Nancy filed for divorce citing her husband's adultery with Cecily, and Cecily signed the necessary 'confession' document as the 'Co-Respondent'. The divorce was finalised in May that year. The only legal barrier to Robert and Cecily marrying now was John. On 2 January 1965, Cecily wrote to John to tell him that she wanted to marry Robert. To divorce him, she would have to provide details of his adultery with Fran and name her the 'Co-Respondent'. He had never owned up to his affair with Sabne, although Meredith believes that Cecily had become aware of it. The alternative was for John to agree to initiate divorce proceedings, in which case Robert would be the named 'Co-Respondent'. It did not sit well with Cecily that, even though she had decided in 1963 that 'enough was enough' when John left for the UK, in order to marry the man she now loved she would have to take the 'blame'. She thought it particularly unfair if, as she suspected, John had had affairs throughout their marriage about which he had said nothing.

Robert considered that John possibly rationalised himself as the injured party because 'it is too difficult for him to be magnanimous to the person who has rejected him: it was an offence against your marital duty and also a blow to his pride', he told Cecily.[7] Robert shared other insights

6 R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200 Restricted, box 20, file 88, 2 January 1965.
7 R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200 Restricted, box 20, file 89, 28 April 1965.

into John with Cecily. To a comment Cecily made to the effect that John would do better as a politician than a writer of books, Robert said, 'he's too uncompromising and too incapable of working with other people in the way politics requires; he doesn't trouble to understand other people – I doubt if he's really interested in them as individual human beings; what he wants is to save Humanity'.[8] John procrastinated and Cecily issued a petition for divorce. Subpoenas were served on him and Fran to obtain the information Cecily needed to support her petition, which resulted in a flow of unhappy letters.

To complicate family relationships further, John visited Canberra in April 1965. Meredith prepared lunch for us all at her place. She and Clive had returned from Malaya to live in Canberra in early 1964 where Meredith was engaged in tutoring in economics at ANU. The following day we all, including Cecily, at whose house we first had drinks, went to dinner as a family. Cecily and John 'behaved well' according to my diary note, although unsurprisingly John displayed no warmth to Cecily. Cecily's account to Robert, who, by this time had taken a year's study leave from ANU and was in the USA before travelling on to the UK, was that John behaved towards her as he always had, 'cold and dead and just as though he would really prefer I didn't exist'. Cecily wrote of John, 'He is <u>just</u> the same as he was. It is quite extraordinary. Silent and rather sulky, and quite charming at times to the others in my presence.'[9]

John left for London on 17 April and, on 29 April, he informed Meredith by letter that he intended to marry Leone, his Australian girlfriend. Since she was not much older than Meredith, and that while Clare and I had met her Meredith had not, it came as a shock. Then again, John had shown us the luscious nightdress that he brought for Leone on his trip. I had two parents proposing marriages to their new loves, and a sister, Clare, who announced in May that she was to marry too. I was involved in student anti–Vietnam War protests while trying to study in my first year of law and so, apart from noting the various family antics in my diary, I dwelt almost entirely on my own life. Two more divorce proceedings were afoot in 1965 that were a fallout from our parents' problems: *Parker v. Parker* and *Campion v. Campion*. Robert, Nancy, Max and Fran ended their marriages. Cecily and John were to follow – although at this stage John was still not cooperating.

8 R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200 Restricted, box 20, file 89, 23 August 1965.

9 R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200 Restricted, box 20, file 89, letter to Robert, 8 April 1965, original emphasis.

After John's departure, Cecily aired doubts to Robert about marrying him. Her expressed reason was that she was concerned about past relationships of Robert's, referring to friendships that he had forged while he was on an extensive trip to Africa and elsewhere some time before. She talked of shadows between them of which he seemed unaware, and she wanted him to acknowledge these issues before they married. She wrote:

> I can never be the same person to you as I was to John … the sadness and the pain will never go and I do not want them to. What sort of person would I be if I did? John probably has the bottom place in my heart and can never be moved from it … I suspect it is much more like this with you and Nancy than you are able to realise … and that is why it is haunting you …[10]

She told him that she was not sure she could marry him, unless she could be herself. Then, in a letter two days later, coincidentally hers and John's wedding anniversary, she told Robert that she was sorry she had expressed doubts about marrying him.

Cecily's indecision about marrying Robert was a repeat of her indecision about marrying John. Before both marriages, she expressed her love for her man as well as her uncertainties and worried about them not accepting her for who she was. With Robert, she seemed to want to know more about his past relationships and whether he had the ability to understand her at a reasonably deep psychological level. She kept pressing Robert, telling him, 'I am not at all certain that I am getting through to you at all. Through to your imagination. Robert darling, that is where I want to get. One glimmering of this and I will be very happy.'[11] Robert responded in return, best as he could, by drawing comparisons between his feelings towards Nancy, and Cecily's towards John. He wrote:

> Reading these letters of yours again, I think I can see you having very much the same feelings about him as I have been about Nancy: simply the difficulty of seeming to abandon them to loneliness or unhappiness, and at the same time the memory of how impossible it was, and unhappy they were, when we were together with them. Damn human nature.[12]

10 R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200 Restricted, box 20, file 89.
11 R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200 Restricted, box 20, file 89, 27 April 1965.
12 R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200 Restricted, box 20, file 89.

Cecily continued her introspection in her letters to Robert. She talked about her now long-past mystical experience and about how her reading Jung's works saved her from complete isolation. She told Robert that even so, for a few more years after, she felt she was fighting against insanity; that while trying to intellectualise her experience, she was also trying to win John's approval by working on his first book. The intensity of the exchange and their philosophical content deepened. Cecily told Robert that when she is with him, she gets caught up in his 'aura' – his niceness – and then, she stated, that she knows from her association with others that she can react too sensitively to their 'auras' and that she could see that this was due to 'a lack of firm knowledge of what I am myself'.[13] Some of her letters were almost preaching in tone with regard to her relationship with Robert. She anticipated future problems, and debated whether she would marry him unless he accepted all sorts of things she perceived about herself. In the same letters, the tone changed when she discussed ideas she was attempting to formulate in the thesis she was writing for the master's degree in psychology she had embarked upon.

Robert responded with intimate detail to her searching questions. He conveyed the 'deep and mystic sense of unity' that he felt for her beyond anything he had experienced before. In one letter, which Robert wrote from Washington on 18 May 1965, he said: 'Every now and then I am forcibly struck by the realisation that you are quite the most interesting woman I have known.' Then, he addressed some of her concerns on an intellectual level:

> The questions you ask of the world, and of me, are so searching that sometimes I have to fend them off by saying I knew their basic answer even without asking the questions. Well, in a way, that's true. The conviction of the oneness and interdependence of all reality simply grew in me as part of the evolution of my own adolescence. As you know, I must struggle to screw down my 'niceness' in order to let you have what I really think, and I did this the night I wrote [that] your Work did not touch me because I had always taken its essence for granted.[14]

To illustrate his attempt to grapple with Cecily's ideas, he acknowledged his 'arrogance' in reacting to her work: 'For in a number of things you had gone distinctly beyond what I had ever thought. You were groping for

13 R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200 Restricted, box 20, file 89, 3 May 1965.
14 R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200 Restricted, box 20, file 89, 18 May 1965.

a wider range of unity than I had bothered about.' Cecily's letter writing was no doubt therapeutic for her; perhaps it was for Robert too. She told Robert that writing to him led her to make a connection with 'that strange creature, myself as a child, with whom I have felt so long a stranger …'. She explained:

> My aggressiveness, strong individuality, rebelliousness, desire for my own way, determination, standing up for my rights – all these things which have been foreign to me for years, have come to consciousness, and made me recognise myself as that child, Cecily Nixon, who caused everyone so much trouble …[15]

The most puzzling content of the letters Meredith and I pored over in 2016 in the National Library of Australia archives was where Cecily actually wrote to Robert about the possibility of having children! She said, 'I know you want to have children', and 'If we have children (are we brave enough) should we have a flat?' This letter was written in 1965 when she was 48 years old.[16] What could she have been thinking, we asked each other.

Despite the tension between John and Robert over Robert's intention to marry his best friend's wife – Cecily – or perhaps because of it, John and Robert exchanged letters about John's work. John still valued Robert's friendship and intellect. On 28 June, Robert and John met up for lunch in London. It is likely they discussed the divorce proceedings but, it seems, the purpose of the lunch was because John wanted Robert's views on his upcoming book, *International Relations: A General Theory*, published that year.

Cecily kept writing to John too. His infidelity preyed on her mind. In June 1965, she wrote to him about all the women with whom he possibly had relationships even before her indiscretion with Raju in Ceylon. 'It would explain a great deal,' she suggested. 'Why you could never look me in the eye, why you were unkind, your insecurity, why you always made yourself out to be horrible, why you made me do the choosing of you (or did your best to put me in that position) …' John admitted it – or some part of it – conceding that he had several affairs when he was overseas at conferences during wartime.[17] He did not mention any subsequent illicit relationships.

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15 R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200 Restricted, box 20, file 89, 30 May 1965.
16 R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200 Restricted, box 22, file 99, 10 May 1965.
17 R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200 Restricted, box 20, file 89, Cecily reported this to Robert, letter 6 July 1965.

John's confession about his infidelity did nothing for Cecily's self-esteem, as we see from a self-deprecating extract of a letter she wrote to Robert:

> There are times when I wonder how you ever put up with me at all. I am nothing but a nothing, I'm not a thing at all. I can't even cook and sew really well, I disturb and upset you, I'm only a reasonable mother, I've been a hopeless wife. I'm saying all this quite cheerfully really, because I can't really help being so mediocre.[18]

In the midst of Cecily's introspection, she included some thoughts in a letter to Robert about what she should wear for their wedding. Robert responded by designing some outfits for her. Then she revisited the concern she had about John engaging in the sexual act without emotional expression. She discussed the difference between feelings and emotions. Yet again, she recalled Hans Christian Andersen's 'Snow Queen', and her belief that the story continued to fascinate her because there was something about that 'Ice Queen' that was so like her; in the end, her heart of ice was melted.

In another letter to Robert, she referred to what Aldous Huxley had to say about sex and she took Robert through her thoughts about sex sublimation. She reflected on being precocious from her time at Montessori, her fight to keep her sanity, her infatuation with Raju in Ceylon and with poet Alec Hope. Do we glean from these letters that Cecily, finding that Robert was no different from John (or any other man, perhaps?) in terms of displaying inadequate emotional expression in the course of having sex, is questioning her own understanding of love? Confusion in her thinking reigned. From Cecily's perspective, she felt she was 'slowly becoming a different sort of person'.[19] She told Robert that she realised she knew very little about herself, how meaningless her life had been (except for having children), and how 'I have lived through nearly 50 years of utter nonsense thinking it was all real living'. She related those feelings to the healthy effect of menopause, but later stated: 'I feel as though I have built on a rubbish heap instead of on good clean earth and the stink of residue won't leave me alone.'[20]

18 R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200 Restricted, box 20, file 89, '1965', 28 July 1965.
19 R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200 Restricted, box 20, file 89, '1965', 9–13 July 1965.
20 R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200 Restricted, box 20, file 89, '1965', 1 September 1965.

Three months later, in September 1965, Cecily again expressed doubts about marrying Robert. She told him that she felt that she could not marry him until she got 'rid of the terrible pain of the past, until I sort myself out and know who and what I am'. She mentioned a meeting she had with some notable men they both knew, and that one of them, John Kerr (before he became a notorious governor-general), had said to Cecily: 'So, you have decided to marry some other guy, and not one of your old admirers like Nugget or me.' Kerr's wife, Peg, was present when he made the comment. In Cecily's next letter to Robert, she describes her relationship with him as 'devoted', but followed it with: 'I am not in love with you. I do not love you in the way that people usually do love …'. This, she explained, by telling him that she is 'not like other people'.[21]

Reading her letters, Meredith and I could not help wondering how Robert managed her emotional complexity. His and Cecily's relationship had potential for one of great love and understanding, but Cecily was still searching for something that was missing in Robert, as she did with her mother and with John. But Robert found a way through. His letters were openly loving and offered Cecily the world. She came to believe that at last she loved and was loved by someone who understood her. Nevertheless, the passage would not be plain sailing. Both were scarred by a fault-based divorce process and the resolution of disputes over the division of marital assets that left them with financial worries and concerns about their respective children's futures. 'It was never going to be a seamless exit and entry,' Cecily wrote, when considering the moods and feelings she experienced when moving out of an old relationship and into a new one.[22]

In October 1965, Cecily and Robert went to New Guinea for a month for Robert's work. If Cecily believed that by shedding John, ASIO would go away too, she was wrong. Cecily's arrival with Robert in Port Moresby in October 1965, her departure and the people she associated with in between were recorded.[23] Robert was of interest to ASIO, not because he was suspected of anything, but because of ASIO's interest in the research work he was doing on the Territory of Papua New Guinea's constitutional and administrative arrangements as the country moved towards inevitable independence. Independence was granted a decade later.

21 R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200 Restricted, box 20, file 89, '1965', 11 September 1965.
22 Cecily's 'Free writing', 2000, Cecily family file.
23 NAA: A6126, 420, Cecily Margaret Burton vol. 1, 14, report 4 January 1966.

In 1966, I became an unwitting 'source' of information on Robert's and Cecily's activities and whereabouts. Through Robert's contacts he had secured holiday work for me in Port Moresby, first as a typist in the Australian Government's administration section in 1965–66 and on a later trip to assist with the Magistrates Training Courses at the university in Port Moresby. The pay was good and taxes levied by the Australian Government were low (to provide incentives for Australians to work there), and I could afford to fund my travel and living expenses for the two months or so each year that I worked there. It satisfied my travel lust too. On my return to university in Canberra for the 1966 academic year, I was befriended by a former patrol officer who had been repatriated to Australia and who had commenced an arts degree at the university by way of retraining. We had Papua New Guinea in common. It was years later that he admitted to me that he had been 'assigned' by ASIO to befriend me (I assume, in exchange for his university fees being paid when he resettled in Australia) to gain what information he could about my 'stepfather' Robert Parker. Student informants were known as 'sparrows'; they are everywhere but none are noticed. My friend's name was also Robert, and to avoid confusion I will call him Bob. On one of Robert's trips to Papua New Guinea, his briefcase went missing for several hours after his arrival in Moresby. It turned up, but Robert found that his papers had been played with; they were out of order. I had no idea then that my idle chat with Bob allowed ASIO to monitor Robert's movements and activities. On 24 June 1966, Robert wrote a letter to the *Canberra Times* on the theme of ASIO and the threat it posed to civil liberties – and democratic politics. He wrote another on 19 March 1973, perhaps after another similar experience. He knew about how its activities had affected John and John's colleagues, and now he was experiencing some of its work himself.

Bob did, I believe, form a genuine friendship with me, or he would not have owned up later that he was told to befriend me as part of his ASIO spying activities. He initially won me over by his generosity in lending me his Volkswagen car for a period he was away from Canberra. I asked why he would entrust it to me when I had, in fact, rolled another friend's VW only a few months earlier during the holidays in the hills just outside Moresby. 'If you have rolled a VW,' Bob said, 'you will now have learned from the experience, so I trust you.' Trust went both ways, and in the course of our friendship I naively spoke freely about my family and

my stepfather's visits to Moresby. I learned later that Des Ball became a 'sparrow' in his honours year at ANU to report on 'student unrest' on campus.[24]

In March 1966, Robert and Cecily moved into a more spacious and prestigious home in Grey Street, Deakin. Robert was uncomfortable living with Cecily without being married to her. He urged John to hurry up and sign the divorce papers. He understood from John that the divorce hearing had been set for 24 January, and that the 'decree absolute' would be granted after a period of three months. In June 1966, Robert wrote to Gerald Firth, who was then in London, to ask him to try and find out from John what the status of the Burton divorce was. He wanted to marry Cecily as soon as he could. 'This delay is getting irksome … we are anxious not to live in this social twilight world any longer than we can help …'[25] A message came back that the divorce had been granted at the end of May. John had reason to push ahead with the divorce; he wanted to marry Leone.

Robert and Cecily planned to marry 'very quietly' on 21 June. John and Leone married in London on 7 June 1966, beating Robert and Cecily to the post. Robert and Cecily's proposed wedding date came and went. Cecily did not receive the papers from London until 25 June. They married on 25 July 1966. In October they travelled as Professor and Mrs Parker to Lord Howe Island for a delayed two-week honeymoon. According to Robert, they needed it, 'for a rest and to enable Cecily to get used to a change of name'. John sent a Christmas card to Cecily and Robert in an envelope addressed to 'Mrs C. Parker'. Cecily reproached him pointing out that he should have addressed her as Mrs R. Parker, as she was a married, not a widowed, woman. John's barbed reply was: 'Sorry about the identity problem. Some of us don't have a problem and therefore do not think about it! Cause and effect.'[26]

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24 Ball, drinking with a friend (name withheld) in Civic, Canberra, in early 1969, told the friend that during his 1968 honours year he had been paid a research assistant's salary to provide reports to ASIO. Ball had studied economics, in which Meredith tutored him, before he switched to focus on political science and security studies.

25 R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200, box 13, file 22, 9 June 1966.

26 Correspondence, December 1966, Cecily family file.

# 35

# Looking to Jung

In 1965, Cecily was tiring of her administrative job at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies. She was expected to more or less 'run the show' because the anthropologist in charge worked and lived in Sydney. She was persuaded to stay and, in 1967, she was given the position of research officer, which involved documenting fragmentary knowledge on Aboriginal sites, informants and other materials. With an increase in salary and less administrative responsibility, she felt happier at work and in herself. She told Robert that this was the first time in her life that she could remember not being under great strain: 'No John, no terrible job'.

Eventually, this mostly 'pencil and paper work' palled. Having discovered Jung and drawn on his philosophy to help her personal growth and better handle her relationship with John, Cecily wanted to help other people with relationship difficulties. She rang Margaret Evans, a leading marriage guidance counsellor, and asked her advice on how she might pursue a career change. Evans suggested she do some marriage guidance training. 'You don't have to stick with it, but it's good training.'[1] Cecily took up the suggestion and, in addition to counselling training, she went to courses on interpersonal relations and group leadership and realised that this vocation would be right for her. In January 1969, as a qualified counsellor, she commenced part-time work with the Canberra Marriage Guidance Counselling service.

1 Parker, interview by Meredith Edwards, 2004, 83.

In early August 1969, she had to take a year's break from her work, however, to accompany Robert on his study leave, during which he would work in Hove in Sussex in the UK. Cecily thought that, as Robert's wife, it was expected of her. She was not a traveller, nor did she take well to upheaval and leaving a job she loved, her family and friends and the gracious split-level home in O'Connor with a leafy garden they had just moved into and which she had had little time to enjoy. Robert loved new places, meeting new people and being in new worlds. Cecily was jealous of how easily he engaged with others as soon as they relocated – so different from how she felt she was. Apart from enjoying a fortnight's holiday in the vicinity of Venice and Verona, Cecily decided not to travel everywhere with Robert while they were away. Instead, they explored Sussex together at weekends. When they were apart, Robert wrote to her about everything he did, saw and observed. He wanted to assure her that he could be with and enjoy other people and love her at the same time. Cecily found it hard to adjust to a new environment but made the best out of the trip. She embarked on a year-long course at the Institute of Group Analysis and took a term's course in student counselling. Between October 1969 and June 1970, she worked as a part-time counsellor with Brighton and Hove marriage guidance counselling service.

They returned to Australia in July 1970, in time for Robert to return to New Guinea for a fortnight for a constitutional development seminar.[2] Cecily resumed her marriage guidance work and was kept busy with clients referred to her by friends and acquaintances as well as from the counselling service. In addition, she did some student counselling at ANU and was engaged by the ANU Education Research Unit to undertake interviews in Canberra and interstate. She also commenced a master's degree in counselling psychology at ANU that included practical experience as well as a written thesis. Influenced by Jungian philosophy, she completed her thesis in 1972, titled 'Regression and Psychotherapy', and was awarded her degree in 1974. Robert engaged with her over her thesis, although she thought that he did so 'without ever probably understanding' what drove her to write it, or its importance to her.[3] He, on the other hand, proudly wrote to his son about her work, noting that she had some fresh things to say on the subject about 'Regression' and talked with pride about the

2 R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200, box 10, file 85.
3 Cecily's 'Free writing', 2000.

quality of Cecily's work in a letter to his daughter mentioning that Cecily had also turned to writing poetry and had several small pieces published in the *Canberra Times*.

While enjoying her work, at the end of 1973 Cecily left the marriage guidance counselling service because she became unconvinced that conventional marriage guidance methods were appropriate. She did not believe counselling should only be about how couples can get back together and make a marriage work. She had no illusions about her own marital relationships. While she was in a reasonably satisfying marriage with Robert, she still did not feel completely fulfilled and so, being emmeshed in a marriage she did not find totally fulfilling, she was not going to preach to others that it was the 'right' thing to do. She came to see that sometimes marriage partners as well as their children might benefit from a separation, if the parties could find happiness in themselves.

A dilemma of the times faced women like Cecily. Most were financially dependent on their husbands. It was unlikely that Cecily could have become the successful counsellor she became without Robert. Men, too, depended on their spouses for love, support and a steady companionable presence in their lives, but generally they were financially independent and they did not have to give up their family name for the sake of having a mate. In addition, Cecily lived in and conformed to a culture in which many women perceived themselves as incomplete without a man. Jung's works guided Cecily into understanding that 'wholeness' came from within oneself, not from joining up with another. Later she read, and urged her daughters to read, Penelope Russianoff's *Why Do I Think I Am Nothing without a Man*, to help us achieve 'wholeness'. However, Cecily continued to believe that marriage partnerships were the basis of personal fulfilment. Searching for the right partner was the challenge, she believed; and to help people better choose a partner, they first had to find their own identity.

From 1974, Cecily used her training to lead many and varied groups in sensitivity and group dynamics: university students, marriage guidance trainees, schools, churches, the Family Planning Association and the Abortion Counselling service. She conducted an encounter group for Presbyterian missionaries. She also tutored various groups in aspects of psychology and attended Gestalt and psychodrama workshops, among others. She participated in a series of talks and case demonstrations given by Canberra doctors and psychiatrists at the Woden Valley Hospital.

Between 1974 and 1981, Cecily became a group leader at St Marks Theological Institute. While she imparted knowledge and skills to others, she kept learning herself.

Cecily was also employed at the School Without Walls in 1974 as a 'non-counsellor' and community relations coordinator. It was a new experimental secondary school, which emphasised choice, voluntary effort and maximum communication between pupils and teachers and parents. Cecily enjoyed the warm and friendly atmosphere but disliked the school's indifference to all ideas of excellence and effort. She was uncomfortable in the unstructured environment and the social pressure that was placed on everyone to conform to the school's philosophy. The answer for Cecily was to work on her own. She left the school in the first half of 1975 to commence a private practice in clinical psychology – the beginning of her 'real' career.

According to a colleague of Cecily's who Meredith interviewed, Cecily appeared not to be a team player. Cecily's non-conformist approach smacks of John's individualism. As a public servant, he was not seen to be a team player either. Both Cecily in her counselling of individuals and John in his resolution of problems between disputants focused on the source and cause of discontent before applying preset rules to the situation they were dealing with. Cecily understood that there could be a variety of deep-seated underlying causes for individual relationship problems, and she wanted to help people find themselves as individuals.

Having stumbled upon Carl Jung, Cecily felt that she was well-placed to help others suffering in complex relationships as she had suffered. Jung's philosophy was to guide the rest of Cecily's life. She understood him. His life and writings brought her to understand herself better, she felt better understood by others and understood others better too. Meredith and I found clues as to how Jung resonated with Cecily in her heavy underlining of sentences in his written works. For example, she highlighted the oft quoted paragraph:

> As a child, I felt myself to be alone, and I am still, because I know things and must hint at things which others apparently know nothing of, and for the most part do not want to know. Loneliness does not come from having no people about one, but from being unable to communicate the things that seem important to oneself, or from holding certain views which others find inadmissible … But loneliness is not necessarily inimical to companionship, for no

> one is more sensitive to companionship than the lonely man, and companionship thrives only when each individual remembers his individuality and does not identify himself with others.[4]

Cecily embraced Jung's use of the concept of the Mandala, 'magic circle', as the symbol of the centre goal, or of the self as psychic totality. He wrote: 'We must ask questions which challenge the whole personality.' He said: 'I knew that in finding the mandala as an expression of the Self I had attained what was for me the ultimate.'[5]

It was through Jung that Cecily came to understand what had happened to her at the top of the driveway that day in September 1951 when the trees and mountains shimmered, and her world was never again the same. She embraced his technique and dug deep down into her soul to discover her whole. She called it 'mid-life enlightenment'. Finding Jung told her that in feeling different, which she always believed she was, she was not alone. Cecily found and read books by others who had personal experiences beyond explanation that for all the world appeared to be activated by an external force, but which was not so. In her copy of Morag Coate's *Beyond all Reason: A Personal Experience of Madness* (1964), Cecily marked a paragraph in a chapter, 'The Tide of Unreason', in which the author discussed a short period when she felt she had lost her reason and become insane:

> Months earlier when I was alarmed in case I might be losing my sanity, the fact that I could feel this fear showed that I was not more than partly submerged in my own inner mind. I was like a swimmer who has gone out of his depth and fears drowning; sometimes my head was above water, sometimes under the surface …

The author went on to describe what had happened to her as she got into deeper and deeper water and lost rational view of life. She was taken away by ambulance, and when she awoke as her normal self, she realised she had recently been mad. Cecily might have been saved from that fate because, through studying psychology, she understood the power of the mind. She had clung and hung on to her precipice and avoided suffering madness before she found Jung.

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4 C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, recorded and ed. Aniela Jaffé, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (London: Collins, 1963).

5 Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 117, 197.

When Cecily was 83 years old, she wrote:

> During my struggle for mid-life enlightenment, which thrust itself upon me in 1952, I discovered the psychology of Jung. This explained much about human nature, including my own, which had been puzzling me. Jung's work is still the source of my deepest and broadest understanding, though I value highly the work of many other psychologists. I continue to learn, but expect to stop practising this year.[6]

Jung grew up in a more religious household than that of Cecily; his parents' disputes led to their separation, and he lost his father when he was in his teens. But there are similarities in what troubled both Jung and Cecily in their childhood. Jung, in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, told of being 'deeply troubled' by his mother's being away in hospital when he was cared for by a maid. He became distrustful when the word 'love' was spoken. He saw his mother as the strong parent and his father, although reliable, as suffering 'powerlessness' – very similar to Cecily's perception of her own parents. Jung's young world-view also changed with the sudden appearance of his new-born sister, leaving him with 'a vague sense of distrust which sharpened my curiosity and observation', although the event did not trouble him as Eleanor's arrival did for Cecily. Like Cecily, he did not like competitiveness. Interestingly, Jung wrote about discovering that he was 'actually two different persons' – the schoolboy lacking in confidence and another, more powerful. He had an awareness that he compensated his inner insecurity by an outward show of security, acknowledging that the schoolboy did what was expected of him while the other was 'more grown up, sceptical, mistrustful, remote from the world but close to nature, earth and the sun …'.[7]

Cecily appears to have been less aware of her two different selves. She had always felt that she was different from others and that people generally did not understand who she really was on the inside. She lacked confidence and spoke and wrote about her perceived incompetence and inadequacies. Yet, she presented a different self to others: as confident, strong and capable. She proved in her life with John, and thereafter, to be extremely competent, able to adapt to John's constant change in career direction and to assist him physically on the farm and intellectually with his writing. It took her time to realise her own power; the time would come when John could not hide from others his awe of her.

6 Journal, 1999, Cecily family file.
7 Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 50–51, 61–62.

# 36

# Coming into her own: Counselling Cecily style

In July 1975, Cecily commenced private practice as a counsellor and psychotherapist at her home in O'Connor, running groups as well as seeing individuals and couples. One thing led to another and Cecily eventually embarked on a career as a well-regarded and respected psychotherapist. Over a period of three years, Cecily's practice grew as word-by-mouth recommendations provided her with a solid client base. In May 1978, Cecily and Robert moved into a two-storey, dignified home that backed onto a reserve on the hillside of Curtin. Its downstairs area of two rooms, a bathroom and its own entrance made an ideal studio for Cecily in which to run her counselling practice. Here Cecily could talk with her clients in a lounge room atmosphere. Shelves of books, paintings on the walls, pot plants and casual furniture created a peaceful ambience with a comfortable balance between the professional and the personal. One of Cecily's clients recalled a plant cutting in a pot protected from the frost by plastic wrapping sitting outside Cecily's door and saw it as a nurturing symbol.

Meredith interviewed many of Cecily's former clients from which, collectively, we try to convey a picture of how Cecily came across to them and an idea of her counselling style. According to those interviewed, Cecily greeted clients with an open, unpretentious smile and she exuded warmth. She offered them a couch to sit on and settled herself in a chair opposite with a coffee table between them. She would sit with her legs crossed, her hands in her lap, waiting for her client to speak. There were often moments of silence in her sessions, but not uneasy ones. She did not

try and fill silences with chatter. She did not indulge in small talk. This accords with our own recollections of Cecily; in her social interactions, if Cecily asked someone how they were, she expected an honest, rather than a merely polite, reply. If she talked about the weather, it was because there was something different or wonderful about it that was worth commenting on.

In developing her own style, Cecily heeded Jung's approach that, for the purpose of therapy, the problem is always the whole person, never the symptom alone; and true to Jung's teachings that each person is different, Cecily individualised her approach to her clients rather than using any special techniques. She sent one client away with children's books to read. She often encouraged her clients to write down their feelings or thoughts, and sometimes she would ask the client to draw what she or he had just said or felt. She had felt pens and paper on hand. She asked questions that often took her clients out of their frame, to somewhere else, in order to give them a different perspective of where they were at in their lives. She would answer questions by asking more, rather than providing answers.

Her former clients talked about Cecily as warm, supportive and non-judgemental. She was perceived as encouraging, always calm, empathetic and an 'active' listener. A former client – I will call her Mary, not her real name – described the power of Cecily's understated style. Cecily did not say much to her at all on their first meeting; she just listened and asked her some gentle questions about her earlier life that, at the time, seemed unrelated to the issues of concern that Mary had raised. Mary started to cry at her first meeting with Cecily in the course of her response; crying was something she rarely did. Later, Mary became self-aware of the links between matters that occurred during her childhood and the relationship issues that had brought her to see a counsellor. By getting her to deal with some buried emotions, Cecily had provided Mary with a glimpse of someone different from whom Mary thought she was. Mary found it an uncomfortable experience but it helped her to make a decision about a relationship she was in. In effect, Cecily had given Mary a 'tiny nudge' in the right direction – like a 'tiny mirror' reflecting back what she had felt.

Another client – I will call her Kim – saw Cecily after Kim's father had died and she had then separated from her boyfriend. She felt she could not 'move on' after these events. She had never been to a counsellor before. She found Cecily in the phone book, later deciding it was a fortunate choice. One of the first questions Cecily put to Kim was: 'Tell me about

your childhood.' It seemed an unusual question, unrelated to why she had come to see Cecily, so Kim gave her a brief and sanitised version. Over the next two years, Cecily 'peeled [Kim] back like an onion', gently, but with persistence. She sent Kim home with library books that Kim read in case Cecily questioned her on them. Over time it became clear to Kim that the reason she had such difficulty getting over her father's death had roots in her childhood. There were times during the therapy and after that she would become angry because 'once the layers are peeled off, you cannot go back'. Overall, Kim described the time she had with Cecily as 'like entering another universe'. Reflecting back on her life decades later, Kim regarded her time with Cecily as a turning point; it changed how she saw her life and herself. Over the next 30 years, although Kim did not see Cecily again, she always remembered her and, in her words, 'You don't need to be with a therapist for therapy to go on'.

There were times when Cecily broke from being non-judgemental in order to be firm or directive. On one occasion, a client – I will call her Sandra – showed Cecily a letter from her mother that had distressed her. Cecily said, 'I can hold onto that letter for you', and did. Later, Sandra surmised that Cecily did this because she saw, but did not say, that Sandra's mother had been emotionally manipulating her daughter. Mostly playing a passive role, at times, Cecily would see a need to strongly interact at several levels. On another occasion, according to Sandra, Cecily said, 'You must not do that', in response to something Sandra talked to Cecily about. Even so, Cecily appeared to be on a journey with her, not directing her. Sandra was another client who said Cecily had changed her life.

One of Cecily's clients who she saw in 1972 for many years had been sexually abused as a child, long before child sexual abuse and incest were truly understood. Lucy – not her real name – having gained insight from her sessions with Cecily on how the trauma had affected her, re-entered the workforce to discover that she was not a lone survivor of sexual abuse. From talking about it, she was able to encourage others to do so.

Cecily had a client who, in the late 1980s, had suffered stress at work. She told her colleagues at work that Cecily helped her, and two of them went to see Cecily too. They went because they were suffering from stress at work, but all three had very different personal lives and problems. Cecily built up the self-worth of each, made them feel okay so that they could cope with the stressors in their lives. She made helpful suggestions and observations, sometimes 'giving permission' to limit contact with

a relative, even a mother, who might be causing them distress; she drew out what, given their emotional morass, they could not work out for themselves. She helped people reflect rather than react.

Cecily was careful about what she revealed about herself to her clients. Sometimes she talked about something personal to help illustrate a point. On one occasion, Cecily told a client, I will call her Jane, that when Cecily had had an operation on her eye – probably a cataract removal – the anaesthetic had had an adverse effect on her. She explained that she managed to counter the side effects by managing her diet. Jane took this as an illustration of how Cecily took some control of her own life by being an equal participant in the medical process rather than placing herself entirely in her doctor's hands. The message Jane received was that Cecily encouraged her clients to participate in their counselling relationship with her. Jane had been completing a psychology degree at ANU at the time. But it was Cecily, more than the course, that Jane said had enabled her to see herself through her own eyes rather than through the eyes of others. When Jane's counselling sessions finished, Cecily gave her a book of poems by Kahlil Gibran. In a moment of self-revelation, she also gave Jane a Haiku poem she wrote herself, beautiful in its simplicity:

> Through open windows enters
> Silent dawn bringing
> A hundred bird songs.

Jung believed that dreams inform us and Cecily embraced this idea. A regular question she would ask was: 'What have you been dreaming about?' When a client described a dream, Cecily would ask: 'What do you think that might mean?' An exploration of the interpretation that often as not opened up a path to assist that person's self-awareness.

Cecily expanded her practice to include therapy groups. She held evening 'self-knowledge' groups of six to eight people who were free to attend individual sessions without being asked to make a commitment for a set number of sessions. Participants reported that Cecily managed the group dynamics well and appeared unfazed by outbursts of anger from someone in a group. She did not become too close to them as she did not want to be seen as a surrogate mother. Former clients reported that Cecily believed in them; this was important to those who felt that no other close adult did.

Throughout the 1980s, in addition to private clients and some referrals from a local general practitioner, Cecily was retained by solicitors or individuals to provide expert reports to present to courts to support a party's position. Her forensic services covered civil, criminal and family law matters. She also attended professional conferences and seminars and participated in weekend retreats.

In February 1984, Cecily became a member of the Australian Psychological Society and the Institute of Clinical Psychologists, the two relevant professional bodies in Australia. She became a founding and life member of the Canberra chapter of the Australian Clinical Psychology Association. Not that she had any enthusiasm for institutional activities, as such; what she enjoyed most was the actual work of counselling and reading in the field. She was also instrumental in establishing the ACT Jungian Society, which held its inaugural meeting in 1984. In June that year, Cecily gave the first public lecture of the new society, speaking on 'The Essence of Jung's Psychology'.

In 1985, in pursuit of the benefits of dream analysis, Cecily established a weekly Dream Group that she led free of charge. By 1987, places in her weekly lunchtime group were filled with a core group of about five regular attendees and others who came and went. They brought their own lunch and Cecily provided tea and coffee. People put in $2 or other small change with the proceeds to be given to the Jungian Society. In private, Cecily affectionately called the group participants her 'dream boats'. Her role as group leader was to get the group to engage with each other, gain insights and become more reflective of their own lives. She encouraged the participants to keep a dream diary so that they could discuss each other's dreams and reflect on them. From her own understanding of the literature, she also told her dream boats what symbols in dreams might mean. She sometimes shared her own dreams with the group for their analysis. One woman, I will call her Sue, recalls one where Cecily was near a murky pool with unpleasant things in it, and she was nervous about going into it. Sue believed there must be something troubling Cecily. She suggested that Cecily privately visualise 'getting into the water'. Cecily did that and reported back to Sue that it had helped her deal with a troubling issue. Cecily gave a little of herself in this way and, while she did befriend some of her dream boats, she maintained a professional distance.

In 1986, Cecily obtained a certificate in Myers–Briggs Personality Types, to help with her understanding of people and how best to relate to them. She gained 'great sustenance' from the local Jungian Society,

giving lectures, and arranging or running one-day workshops. On one workshop on 'active imagination', for example, she asked participants to bring crayons and drawing paper to help them better understand the work and principles of Jung. She reviewed Jung's *Answer to Job* for the society newsletter in which she explained that the gist of the work was concerned with the inadequacy of traditional Christianity to cope with the problems of today; a message with which, surely, John would have agreed.[1]

In 1987, Cecily was made the first life member of the local Jungian Society, in recognition of her contribution to the founding and running of the society. At the end of the year, Cecily and Robert hosted the Jungian Society Christmas Party. It was 'a soiree filled with such excellence, that its reputation deserves to be spread to the four corners', psychologist Caroline Rolls reported in the chapter's next newsletter. Each of the 20 or so members brought a plate of food to share that became a 'feast of tastes'. Between courses, a soprano member of the group sang songs accompanied by Robert at the piano and another person on the flute. Skits of Jung and Pooh Bear portrayed a 'mystical encounter' that dealt with the inner journey of life, and there was a presentation of a 'chance meeting' between the four functions: thinking, feeling, intuition and sensation. The audience's task was to guess at the identities.

Cecily became known in Canberra for her interest in the psychology of Jung in her private practice work and became so busy that she considered not advertising her service and rationing the time she spent with each client. She became a role model for young psychologists. Retired clinical psychologist and director of the Canberra Marriage Counselling Service from 1981 to 1988 – now Relationships Australia – Dr Malise Arnstein attests to this. Arnstein regarded Cecily's peers, Margaret Evans and Leila Bailey, as the 'Grandes Dames' of clinical psychology in Canberra, and Cecily, specialising in Jungian psychotherapy, was the third 'Grande Dame' in this respect.[2]

Absorbed in her work, Cecily became less inclined to accompany Robert on trips overseas that he so enjoyed. He had friends and relatives he liked to visit and lamented that they might not meet Cecily. 'The chance of Cecily travelling gets increasingly remote – she feels the need so little and is so absorbed in her practice … So, you'll have to come here to meet

1 C. G. Jung, *Answer to Job* (London: Routledge, 1955).
2 Personal communication, 10 September 2018.

her …', he wrote to Canadian friends.[3] Cecily had found her purpose in life – to work with people to try and improve their lives – and she rarely travelled with Robert from that time on.

Cecily's purpose in life included us – improving her own family's lives and relationships – although she felt she was failing to improve her own. While John was mostly absent through our adult lives, Cecily was always there to give us, and her grandchildren, wise counselling. Our mother was the silver thread that bound our family together through our adventures and adversities, the family's emotional hub; the family matriarch.

There were always issues on which we sought her help. She was quiet and reserved and, at the same time, confident and self-contained. Because she appeared to be complete, wise, self-aware and accepting and non-judgemental of others, we had little understanding of her inner turmoil, which she shared with few others. We 'dumped' our issues on her and nothing we told her seemed to surprise her. One of her clients described her as 'unflappable'. It is clear to us, now, that we drew on Cecily excessively to support us in our self-focused lives. We clearly overwhelmed Cecily – or I at least did – with our outpouring of goings-on in our lives. If only we daughters had understood her needs and loaded on her fewer of ours!

**Three sisters, Meredith, Clare and Pam, Canberra, 1995.**
Source: Family collection.

3 R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200, box 40, file 184, 'General Correspondence, letters to Percy and Virginia Black', 7 June 1984 and 29 November 1985.

Meredith, Clare and I were all intense about our various fields of work. We bewildered our children by our overly busy and ambitious lives. We all worked in areas in which we believed we could achieve social change to benefit the disadvantaged and women in particular. John's philosophy was that 'you shouldn't have to work; you should only want to work', and want to work we did. Clare declared that we were born with a Methodist work ethic and Meredith and I agreed with her – it came from both parents.

Cecily's love of people and interest in them for whoever they were did not prevent her from having views, as did John, on who might make suitable partners for us. By way of background, John had frowned on Meredith dating 'cordies' (Duntroon military cadets) and was angry about Clare seeing her young German 'boy-next-door' friend, while Cecily discouraged me from wanting to marry a carpenter and, before I married my first husband Dan, questioned whether I would be happy living with someone who was 'just a teacher'.[4] As it happened, all three of us married men from working-class backgrounds who were intent on completing higher education. All three of us saw our husbands through their doctorates. Meredith and Clare, in time, went on to complete their own PhDs and my then husband Dan supported me through my master's studies in law. John, having always stressed the importance of us having the education to be self-reliant, proved right in that regard, as we all achieved careers that allowed us to be financially independent. We three needed them, as none of our marriages survived the test of time.

Our marriage breakups, understandably but sadly, impacted on our children. Cecily developed especially close relationships with her grandchildren, connecting with them through books, outings to galleries and concerts, intimate conversations and letters. She encouraged them to talk openly with her, about our parenting or any other issues. All our children developed into sensitive and insightful adults because of, or despite, our parenting and hopefully not our neglect. A good deal of credit for that outcome goes to Cecily.

4 Dan Coward and I married in 1968. He obtained a doctorate in history. He is now Dan Huon and living in Tasmania.

# 37

# Revisiting relationship difficulties

Finding a profession of her own and becoming a leader of others in the field of clinical psychology provided Cecily with the tools to make a difference to the lives of others in her own right. But what Cecily aimed to achieve for her clients she had not yet managed to achieve for herself.[1] Her search for answers as to what went wrong with her relationship with John continued in her correspondence with him throughout her marriage to Robert. On one occasion, John responded that she should 'wake up to herself'. She at first thought this ridiculous, but, on reflection, she conceded in a letter to him in October 1969 that it now made sense. She said that watching Meredith and Clare with their children, she thought that they were better mothers than she ever was, 'in a quite essential way'. She attributed their problems to her bad mothering, stating that she was 'quite inadequate and really unfit to be a mother'. We felt sad reading this, as it seemed that her introspection and over-analysis must have disturbed her. She wrote:

> In some ways something must have gone so wrong with my own early life that I grew up to repress my proper healthy feelings and to live by strange, almost inhuman standards, of detachment and objectivity, though being in my inner most nature far removed from such behaviour. My real feelings broke through of course, from time to time, but in a distorted and harmful way, and quite

1 Cecily's expression of her feelings, where otherwise not referenced, are derived from a study of her writings, journals and letters held in Cecily family file, personal communications with us, and her letters to Robert Parker in R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200.

> unrecognizably. Although I had the best intentions in the world, I must have been unwittingly a cruel and wicked person in many ways to those close to me, and this includes you … It is only now that I have changed, slowly I suppose really, over the last few years, that I can see my past self more clearly.[2]

She went on to try and appease John by saying that he had borne too much of the burden and hoped her letter would relieve him a little of that.

On marrying Robert, Cecily had moved out of John's shadow and had resisted falling into Robert's, standing beside him rather than behind. She adapted to the role of wife while maintaining her sense of self and independence. However, she had a developing feeling her life with Robert had to be something more. She still suffered from feelings of not being understood by Robert and therefore not loved by him for who she was. Robert did not understand Cecily's discontent, or even that she felt it. He was a kind and caring gentleman, but, like John, he found it hard to express his love or his feelings in ways that satisfied Cecily. Robert loved her, thought she was beautiful and constantly told her so. But Cecily thought Robert could do better in understanding her psyche, in understanding her. She did not stop questioning her relationship openly with Robert and looked to him to give something more than he could.

One of the things Cecily impressed on us as her daughters was that one cannot change people's behaviours, only your own reaction to them. But, on reading her letters, it appears that she had difficulty applying this in her own relationships. She seemed to want Robert to act differently towards her, although she expected him to not try and change her. Part of Cecily's attraction to Robert was the gentleness of her father that she saw in him. He was softly spoken and measured in thinking, as was Cecily's father. With John, she experienced the unpredictability and selfishness of her mother. 'I married my mother first,' she told us when we, all three children, experienced marriage relationship difficulties, 'and then I married my father.' She believed that people generally married someone in whom they saw a parent, and if the relationship went wrong, moved on to a relationship with a person in the image of the other parent. She would smile and say, 'I think people only get it right third time round when they marry someone who suits them.' While Cecily never had the chance to test her theory, ironically, John later did and proved her right.

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2 Cecily to John, letter 16 October 1969, written from Hove, UK, Cecily family file.

Cecily was finding that, like her father, Robert avoided conflict by shying away from robust discussion. If Cecily were unhappy about something, he would console her, rather than dig too deeply to find its cause. Unlike John, Robert would at least listen and smile when Cecily expressed a complex thought about people and their feelings, but he would never quite 'get it', Cecily would say. If Cecily had a complaint, he took it as a criticism and felt hurt, when she hoped he would listen and consider whether he might make adjustments to his responses or behaviour to satisfy her. The very sensitivity Robert displayed as part of the gentle person Cecily loved caused him to feel deep hurt when she told him how a behaviour of his affected her. It left him feeling that he had failed her in some way. Once she pleaded to him, 'Put yourself in my shoes', in an effort to have him understand how she felt after he had said or done something that upset her. He considered this, and replied, 'But dear, no one can put themselves in other people's shoes'.[3] That helped her understand how people's psyches differ. From Cecily's point of view, he was a compassionate and emotional man, but did not venture down the empathetic track to help improve his understanding of her.

Cecily indulged in keeping Robert informed of her feelings, because she wanted him to understand her. In 1975, Cecily and Robert corresponded for almost the whole year while Robert was overseas, the main topic of which was about sexuality and relationships, and theirs in particular. Their relationship reached a precarious point. By mid-1975, it appeared that Robert and Cecily's might not survive. Cecily felt unloved; Robert felt she lacked interest in making love to him – a vicious cycle couples often confront. In one of Robert's letters to Cecily when he was away, he spoke openly about a female friend of his who, he told Cecily, understood him although she was not his lover. Cecily told Robert how strongly she felt about a male friend of hers, which Robert concluded was more so than he felt about his friend. 'I didn't know that that longing was continuing in you so strongly', he sympathised in his letter by return. Nevertheless, Cecily felt hurt by Robert's closeness to his female friend. She told him that she wanted to 'sleep downstairs' when he came home, because she did not want to suffer pain from someone she cares about.[4] Robert responded in horror:

3 Cecily recalled this in a personal communication to the author.
4 R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200 Restricted, box 22, file 99, 27 May 1975.

> For me to stay in another unknown period of celibacy after the hell of this six months [period of it] would be cutting myself off from the only thing without which I find life really not worth living. It is the thing of which I've felt most bitterly deprived throughout my life.[5]

He said he already had 'substantial slabs of celibacy' while being with Cecily:

> 18 months or 2 years (was it?) when I yielded you up to John (there was no sexual life in my home then, nor had been for 3 years before I took up with you); six months on study leave in 1965 before we married; periods of months (quite a few months) in the last few years when, on some occasions, we were trying for just the same adjustments as you are proposing now.[6]

The response was not what Cecily had expected. She was attracted to Robert sexually, as she had been to John; there was 'chemistry' between them. Sexual intimacy was important to her for a fulfilling relationship, but her expectation was that it should always be an expression of emotional love. Disappointment flowed when the reality of her husbands' sexual needs dawned. John had been neglectful in failing to express his love during the physical act of lovemaking; Robert was simply frank about his needs.

Robert went on to express a deep dissatisfaction with the way in which his and Cecily's relationship had developed. He explained that he did not want his female friend instead of Cecily; that was a 'preposterous idea', but that he would be more content with someone who had a better spontaneous rapport with him than Cecily had – 'provided that there was also the deep attraction that you have for me'. But then, he didn't think such bliss was attainable in a real world. He said:

> And then I even moved to thinking that being alone might be preferable to staying with you if things went on as they have been doing – and that once alone, even something blissful might still happen one day – … I have been deeply torn, and teetering on the edge of giving us up as a hopeless job.[7]

5 R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200 Restricted, box 22, file 99, 1 June 1975.
6 R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200 Restricted, box 22, file 99, 1 June 1975.
7 R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200 Restricted, box 22, file 99, 7 June 1975.

Perhaps Robert's exasperation was a wake-up call for Cecily. For things got better between them. He told Cecily that he was mystified by her repetitive expressions of her feelings and what he perceived to be criticisms of him. Cecily wanted them to be direct with each other, but he found it difficult to express his feelings as she asked him to, only to find her telling him that she did not want him to feel hurt by her directness. He told her that he was in a bind. He wrote: 'Too many words this year. Too much hurt, emphasis on negatives – what about the positives?'[8] They kept writing and a point came when Cecily told him that he seems 'to be beginning to understand how I feel, and I am tremendously grateful for that'. It was a breakthrough from her point of view.[9]

There were still times when Cecily perplexed Robert. Sometime in 1977, in the course of one of their discussions, Cecily told Robert that all his feeling seemed to go into his piano playing. Even so, having observed that Robert expressed emotion through his music, playing it and listening to it, she thought he kept even those emotions under control and mentioned to him that he even bottled up feelings when he played the piano. Nevertheless, by then, Robert felt he was doing better in Cecily's eyes, and noticed Cecily's growing confidence. Robert told his son, Rod, in a letter that year about his and Cecily's discussion on how each of them expressed their feelings. He said, 'I guess it's true that most of my life I haven't had good access to my feelings, whatever they are …'.[10] He confided about his not being whole without a woman close and yet that he had 'not been at all successful at *being* close to the quite outstanding women who've consented to live with me – and this has been a problem with Cecily as much as with Nancy'. He also told Rod that, encouraged by Cecily, he had embarked on a process of introspection, and had tried to loosen up and open up.

It is clear that Cecily regarded a partner as necessary for wholeness – rather than wholeness being a prerequisite for a strong relationship. Despite all her self-analysis, Jungian learning, and the importance to her of family and friends, Cecily continued to see a satisfactory long-term relationship with a man as necessary for her personal fulfilment. A cultural shift in thinking might have assisted both Cecily and Robert, but, at the time, it is difficult to imagine that either of them would have believed it was possible to find happiness and fulfilment on their own.

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8 R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200 Restricted, box 22, file 99, dated '31 June' [sic] 1975.
9 R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200 Restricted, box 22, file 99.
10 R. S. Parker papers, NLA, MS 8200 Restricted, box 24, file 117, Family correspondence, Roderick Bolton, 10 September 1977.

**Cecily and Robert in later years.**
Source: Family collection.

They worked on to achieve what appeared to be a successful marriage. By 1980, Cecily had started to expand her interests and share more with Robert. Robert, an accomplished pianist, practised daily on his grand piano and accompanied other musicians who attended their house. Cecily started daily piano practice of her own. She had piano lessons for a time as a child, but after years of lessons, she still felt hopeless and did not continue. Now, she was interested in having lessons again from Robert's piano coach. Robert and Cecily were impressed with his teacher's basic approach. She initiated beginners by mingling the fundamentals of scale, structure and harmony. This helped Cecily understand what music was about with a few elementary lessons and Cecily scheduled in a practice period every day on Robert's piano. It gave them something more in common. Some 18 months later, Robert wrote to his sister with pride about Cecily's achievement.

Cecily started to exercise regularly, too, daily skipping with a rope and swimming in a nearby public pool and, by 1982, she swam several mornings a week before breakfast. Between her professional counselling, she scheduled time for other hobbies that included her garden, ballroom dance classes at which she became proficient, and catching up with her reading in the fields of psychology and counselling. She always made time for us children and her grandchildren.

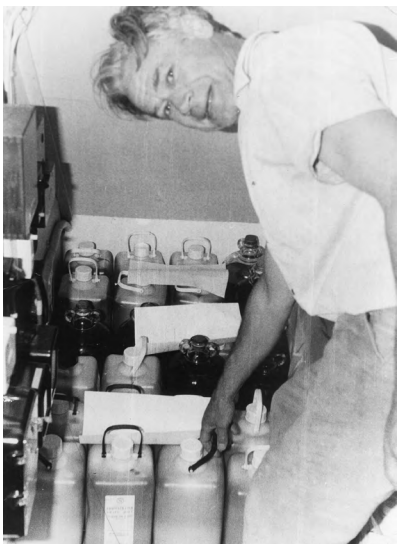
However, Cecily never found complete satisfaction in her marriage relationships. When she was in her 80s, she confided to Meredith that 'if I found the right man now, even now, I would leave Robert'. Would there ever have been 'the right man' for Cecily, we wondered, in circumstances where she did not, could not, see herself as 'whole' without one? The need for financial security might have played a part as it did with many other married women at the time. Intellectually, she maintained her view that a healthy relationship between two people could only be enduring if each were whole, and remained whole on marrying, rather than merging two into one. But then, Cecily never experienced such wholeness before entering into either of her marriages. She sought it on entering those marriages. Was she still searching for the idyllic happiness she perceived she had before she turned two?

Robert and Cecily stayed married; Leone and John ultimately did not. In 1978, John left UCL and, as he was nearing retirement, he and Leone moved to Kent. The Conflict Analysis Research Centre that John by this time had established at UCL in 1966 was transferred to the University of Kent at Canterbury. John headed the centre there but, in effect, handed his work over to Professor John Groom, who took up his baton.

John and Leone bought a smallholding at Biddenden and later moved to Oxley Farm in Smarden in Kent where they lived with their son Mark, then 10. John continued to work at the centre while he ran his farm. John's 'playing' at being a farmer, according to Mark's adult reminiscences, gave John a huge amount of pleasure, 'never more so than when it involved "old Fergie" tractors'. Leone designed the farmhouse and John developed the garden, determined by the 'turning circle of the tractor and the gang-mower'.

Leone seized the chance of John being in semi-retirement to concentrate on her career. She was by then a highly regarded Professor of Mathematics and the main breadwinner. She was dependent on John only to keep the home fires burning and care for young Mark after school while she commuted to London for work. John seemed to be uncomfortable with the role reversal, although he enjoyed having time with Mark, time to make home-brewed beer and to prepare meals, his specialty being roast leg of lamb and baked vegetables. He also had time to think, read and write. His mind was occupied with a developing vision of a problem-solving framework and system that could be applied generically to resolution of conflict. He looked for opportunities to get back into academia.

**John and Mark, Kent, UK, 1969.**
Source: Family collection.



**John with his home brew, Kent, UK, 1969.**
Source: Family collection.

**Leone and Mark, Kent, UK, 1969.**
Source: Family collection.

Tensions started to appear in their household. Meredith visited them when she was in the UK in the late 1970s and spent a weekend counselling each of them at their request. She was uncomfortable in the role and feared that it might strain her relationship with John. She felt that her efforts had been futile.

At the same time, Cecily and John's 'love–hate' relationship lay unresolved. In August 1980, John surprised Cecily by writing: 'I would love to live out the remainder of my life with you. This may be more romance than reality – but comradery would not be platonic.'[11] Cecily knew by then, however, that while she still loved John, she could never live with him.

It became apparent that, by 1980, when Cecily and Robert were resolving their relationship difficulties because they wanted to remain a couple, John and Leone's marriage was fast failing. John wrote to Cecily and talked about his and Leone's unhappiness. He saw the problem as being with Leone not him, again blaming his partner for his relationship failures. He told Cecily, 'Leone is a sick girl: her diabetes is far from under control and in addition she has security or inadequacy problems'.[12] John wrote to Robert too, but it was less personal. He invited Robert to comment on a book he published the previous year, *Deviance, Terrorism and War: The Process of Solving Unsolved Social and Political Problems.*[13] Robert set it for his 'bed time reading' along with other books that had been written by his 'friends'.[14]

In November 1980, ahead of a planned trip to Australia, Leone sent a letter to Meredith about her continuing unhappiness with John: his negative attitudes and unwillingness to take her needs and feelings into account. These were a repeat of some of Cecily's complaints about living with John. Leone was feistier than Cecily, and John and Leone argued loudly and often. In the course of John and Leone's deteriorating relationship, we observed that Mark suffered from parental discord and tension in the house, just as I had as a teen living with Cecily and John.

11 Written between 6 and 29 August 1980, Cecily family file.
12 Letter 16 June 1980, Cecily family file.
13 John Burton, *Deviance, Terrorism & War: The Process of Solving Unsolved Social and Political Problems* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1979).
14 R. S. Parker Papers, NLA, MS 8200, box 46, file 189. Robert reviewed it nevertheless, and replied at length 9 July 1980.

John's past visits to Australia had been rare, and he chose mostly not to venture to Canberra, the place of memories of unhappy professional and personal relationships. After his father Jack died at age 95 in Sydney in May 1970, he had even less reason to visit Australia. However, in December 1980, John, Leone and Mark made a Christmas visit to Canberra. The family, including Cecily and Robert and some of Robert's family, gathered to exchange presents on Christmas Eve. We all spent Christmas Day at the home of John's nephew and his wife, Ian and Susie Hendry. They ran the Affleck winery across the border to the north of Canberra and provided us with an ice-breaking reunion, although probably a little uncomfortable for Leone.

Leone and John's breakup was drawn out and painful. Unlike Robert and Cecily, who were unlikely to part unless one or other of them had another soul mate to go to, John and Leone separated without either of them having another potential lifetime mate on the horizon. Both found solace in their careers. John moved to the USA in 1983 as a visiting scholar at the University of South Carolina. Across the Atlantic Ocean the divorce proceedings were a nightmare. Lawyers exchanged letters and drained monies from both parties' accounts as a War of the Roses saga developed. I had the horror of thinking that if I did not reconnect in some meaningful way with my father at this time, I might find myself at his funeral one day in the USA. When my father told me he was flying from the USA to London to see his lawyers, I decided to join him in London and try to help him and Leone see sense and resolve their differences in the interests of young Mark.

It did the trick. During the week that John and I spent together in the UK, he and Leone agreed on a final division of their property and assets. Each complained that I was biased in favour of the other. The deal was struck late at night at their old farm home in Kent where Leone was living with Mark, now in his teens. It was strange having a brother a few months younger than my youngest daughter. We went out to dinner as a family and, as we drove home, Mark and I held hands in the back of the car while the two 'adults' continued to exchange barbed remarks. We arrived home close to midnight, and I oversaw both John and Leone place their signatures on the agreement we had reached over dinner. Then, John and I got into his car to travel back to London. 'You did a good job,' I said. 'You acted like it really hurt when Leone demanded a last piece of furniture from you, because none of this is really about money for her,

it's all about emotions and love lost.' 'What do you mean, I acted like it hurt? I have been stripped of everything,' John protested. 'Well,' I said, 'it's a good settlement if no one feels like they won.'

Before I left London, John owned up to having met another woman, Betty, of whom he was very fond. I taunted him: 'I am not travelling to America to sort you out when that breaks up.' He told me this was different and that it was 'a mature relationship'. I remember my loving daughterly response: 'I am sure that the only thing mature about it is Betty.' I was probably right. Betty was the best person ever for John, and they made each other very happy.

# 38

# John's 'real career'

John's decision to start a new academic career on the other side of the world turned out to be the right one for him. In August 1963, he had been offered tenure at UCL. John had started to make his mark early in the field of international relations with the help of Quakers. He had enjoyed their support when he became involved in the peace movement in Australia in the 1950s. He later connected with the Quakers through the Rowntree Trust. The family foundation was a philanthropical donor of the Pugwash initiative.

In August 1963, John attended a conference convened on the initiative of British and American Quakers in Clarens, Switzerland. Eastern bloc countries were represented among the 27 or so attendees. All were interested in forming an organisation that might bring the East and West together in their research efforts concerning social and political matters in a scientific environment. John had ideas and expressed them. He was influential in the conference's resolve to establish international Conferences on Research on International Peace and Security (COROIPAS). These conferences would be similar to the Pugwash conferences, but with an international social and political focus, rather than Pugwash's natural sciences focus. The Continuing Committee met in London in early December 1964, out of which the International Peace Research Association (IPRA) was founded with John as its secretary general. The association would, in John's view, take the pressure from Pugwash to expand its work into those fields, which was causing division among scientists. The two organisations were to work together, with representatives from each taking part on the other's standing committees. Pugwash agreed to this. It was John's job to get the new association going and establish behind-the-scenes communications

that he hoped might achieve quiet results. Pugwash had established a precedent when, without publicity, it intervened in discussions between the superpowers over test bans.[1] It was influential in enabling the 1963 Limited Test Ban Treaty, allowing the UK to take the credit for the peace initiative, a game plan that John supported.[2]

In a 1964 article, John discussed power politics in the Cold War, and the circumstances that were forcing nations to reverse their policy of breaking off communications with hostile countries, and to talk more instead. He wrote:

> Quakers have their own methods of dealing with disputes, they know that in situations of tension one should seek increased and not decreased communications. But nations have been known to decrease communications as soon as tensions occurred, thus making tensions worse. To break off diplomatic relations is a nonsensical action. Circumstances are forcing the nations to reverse this policy.
>
> If Quakers could translate into international terms the processes by which they operate, the 'steering' model to which political scientists are referring would mean more to ordinary people.[3]

John's embracing the support of Quakers is interesting because he had never held himself out as having a faith, once he decided against studying theology. It was Cecily who regarded herself as a religious person but of no denomination. She felt close to the Quakers and identified with their philosophy of peace and their practice of communing in silence unless and until there was something someone was moved to share. Notably, John's father understood the value of the Quakers' and others' spiritual religiosity. He wrote in his autobiography:

> It is this 'inner Light' of the Quakers, this *intuitus mentis* of Descartes, and this 'bhakti marg' of the Hindus that seem to me of the essence of true religion. It is along this path of meditation and devotion that the saints in all ages and in many faiths have trod.[4]

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1 For more on this, see Paul Rubinson, 'Pugwash Literature Review', Urban Institute, April 2019, accessed 10 April 2021, www.urban.org/research/publication/pugwash-literature-review.

2 Letters from John to family members, 10 and 29 August 1963, Burton family file.

3 Burton, 'The Evolving International System', *Frontier* 7, no. 3 (Autumn 1964), 209, copy held in John W. Burton papers, NLA, MS 8405, box 1, file 1, published papers 1956–64.

4 Burton, 'The Weaver's Shuttle', 208.

Perhaps his father's and Cecily's appreciation of Quaker philosophy helped John to realise its value to international peace movements. The Quakers later became a most important source of support for John in his pursuit of peace through the theory and practice of conflict resolution.

When John first arrived in the UK to teach international relations at UCL, it was at a time when students interested in governance at the international level were given, as their main text, H. J. Morgenthau's *Politics Among Nations* (as was I when I studied the subject at ANU in Canberra shortly after this time). The students also relied on *Power Politics*, the work of the head of department, Georg Schwarzenberger, which, like Morgenthau's works, argued that a balance of power exercised by superpowers was the means to peace. John had been relieved to find a 'tolerance' of ideas – his ideas, which were so different – and Schwarzenberger welcomed and befriended him. They could not have had more diverse philosophies to impart to students of international relations, but it worked well at the outset. Dunn, in his book on John's philosophy and work, pondered how the two related as colleagues.[5] Dunn notes that the two were sure to differ and, in time, they did.

I had arrived in London only days before Christmas 1963. John and I were invited to Georg's country home on Christmas Day. My Australian winter coat was inadequate protection from the icy-cold weather, but the warmth of the welcome we received was more than compensation and we thawed out in front of a roaring log fire. While indulging in rich food and Christmas cheer, I listened to John and Georg jest about their poles-apart views. At 17, I was curious and bold enough to ask naive questions about power politics and diplomacy. I had already been influenced by John's denouncement of deterrence – 'deterrence did not deter' – and his belief that the dominant power politics theories were false.

Although John welcomed 'tolerance' of his views after his ANU experience, as time passed, he wanted more than to be listened to; he wanted his teachings embraced and applied. He questioned whether any of the prevailing theories or methodologies had actually made a difference to the amount or intensity of conflict in the world and, if not, why maintain them.[6] However, difficulties arose from the different approaches of UCL and the London School of Economics (LSE) that manifested particularly

5 Dunn, *From Power Politics to Conflict Resolution*, 51.

6 Gregory Tillett, 'Booknotes', *Australasian Dispute Resolution Journal* 16, no. 2 (May 2005), 145.

when students from each sat for exams together. John was not able to win the acceptance of the LSE to his less conventional approach to the teaching of international relations.

Over time though, at UCL and later in the USA, John worked on developing a more complex model of dispute resolution, distinct from conventional negotiation, arbitration and mediation. Dunn observed that, within a few years of taking up his UCL appointment, John 'incrementally' left international relations behind as he travelled down the related path of conflict analysis and resolution in pursuit of a general theory for world peace.[7] This would become John's 'real career' – the one he wanted to be remembered for – his role in furthering the theory and practice of analysis and resolution of conflict. He pursued it for the rest of his long life. Adam Hughes Henry wrote: 'In his second career Burton was viewed internationally as a former high-ranking Australian diplomat who became a cutting-edge scholar of new thinking.'[8]

The destructive border dispute that led to hostilities between Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia – and the Borneo confrontation – in the mid-1960s provided John with an opportunity of putting his thinking into practice. He had been pivotal in establishing a Conflict Analysis Research Centre in the UK.[9] The British prime minister, Harold Wilson, had tried to get the disputing parties together. With his encouragement, the centre, then at UCL, intervened with some success. It invited each head of government to send to London three representatives to discuss the problem *in camera* to get to the heart of the problem.[10] The framework the centre used in its impartial third-party facilitation process came to serve as a problem-solving model of what retrospectively became regarded as 'track two' diplomacy.[11]

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7 See Dunn, *From Power Politics to Conflict Resolution*, 79. The centre's home has remained at the University of Kent since its transfer from UCL in 1978, and John's work is honoured by a continuing lecture series in his name.

8 Henry, 'Reflections on Dr. John Wear Burton', 74.

9 'John Burton Lectures', Conflict Analysis Research Centre, University of Kent, undated, accessed 10 April 2021, research.kent.ac.uk/conflict-analysis/events/john-burton-lectures/.

10 John. W. Burton, 'Peace Begins at Home' and 'International Conflict: A Domestic Responsibility', *The International Journal of Peace Studies* 6, no. 1 (Spring 2001).

11 Robin Fraser, 'Track Two Diplomacy – A Distinct Conflict Intervention Category' (Master's diss., University of Victoria, 2012); and see Ron Fisher, *Interactive Conflict Resolution* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997).

With the permission of the United Nations, the centre participated in processes to help resolve conflicts in Northern Ireland and Moldova, among others. Measuring success of the method was difficult because, necessarily, outcomes of such facilitated confidential dialogue between disputants could not be publicised.[12] Communication, open and frank and *in camera*, was the key.

Initially, John was driven by the search for an alternative to the use of force as a means of resolving international disputes. However, the struggle he had in the UK to articulate his model and how it differed from peace talks and other methods of dispute resolution led him to expand his thinking. He drew on research of industrial conflict literature, social psychology and existing dispute resolution systems and frameworks in an effort to work towards a generic approach to resolving conflict. He would eventually find an accepting home for a multidisciplinary approach in the USA.

It took some time for John to establish himself in the USA after he left the UK in 1983. I met up with him in April that year at a conference in Mexico. We returned to his bachelor flat in South Carolina. The dogwoods and azaleas were in full bloom but not so colourful is my memory of John, a sad and lonely man wanting to change the world. My diary note reads: 'Discussed the conference and his proposals and how we can appeal to [Prime Minister] Hawke's vanity and get him interested in an international facilitation centre'. The Quakers were still his benefactors. My then partner, journalist Alan Ramsey, and I had the pleasure of staying with one of his Quaker colleagues, in Boulder, Colorado, from whom I learned how revered my father was for his peace work.

After completion of his fellowship in South Carolina, John obtained a teaching position for two years at the University of Maryland. In 1984, I visited him there and found a much happier man. He was now living with Betty Nathan who he had told me about in London. Betty became the true love of John's life. Like Cecily and Leone, she was intellectually bright and university educated. She was 13 years his junior, not such an obvious gap at their senior ages and, having a Jewish heritage, she was very similar in looks and stature as Leone: dark eyes, short, dark hair and physically fit. Like Cecily, she was a very able editor and turned John's writing into accessible prose. Betty was a caring, sensitive and a very

12 J. C. R. Bayley and J. W. Burton, *Northern Ireland Interim Report* (London: Centre for the Analysis of Conflict, UCL, January 1971); and see Michael Hall in collaboration with Joe Camplisson, *From Conflict Containment to Resolution: The Experiences of a Moldovan-Northern Ireland Self-help Initiative* (Newtownabbey: Island Publications, 2002).

sensible partner for John. He adored her from the moment he met her until he died. She dealt with, rather than dwelt upon, his difficultness. With Betty around, John was energised; he looked younger, smiled more and became academically very productive.

In 1985, John obtained a research and teaching position at George Mason University (GMU). Helpful to John's academic standing in the USA was his existing reputation in his field. In particular, acclaim for him appeared in an article by Andrew Wilson in *The Bulletin* in 1982 in the context of a Bill being considered by both houses of the US Congress for a Peace Academy. The Bill proposed to allocate government resources and set up machinery for conflict resolution. In detailing its history and purpose, Wilson wrote:

> The pioneer of these developments, which have resulted in US Administration backing for the Peace Academy Bill, is an Australian. A former head of the Commonwealth External Affairs Department in the Evatt period, John Burton started work in the field in the 1960s …
>
> With the knowledge and approval of the British Government, his team has involved itself in quite a number of crises in the past 15 years. Its operations, called 'workshops', have included setting up meetings between nominees of the governments of Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia in the Borneo confrontation; meetings between nominees of both sides in the Cyprus dispute; meetings, in both Britain and the US, between parties to the Palestine dispute; and more recently meeting on East-West tension in London and Moscow.[13]

John's thinking, when he had left the UK, was that basic human needs were central to the cause of disputes and identifying them was essential to understanding the root source and cause of any conflict. Around this core he eventually developed his peace theory to the point of articulating a problem-solving framework and system that could guide the practice of conflict resolution at all levels of society to promote sustainable resolutions to conflict in domestic and industrial disputes as well as disputes between nation states.[14]

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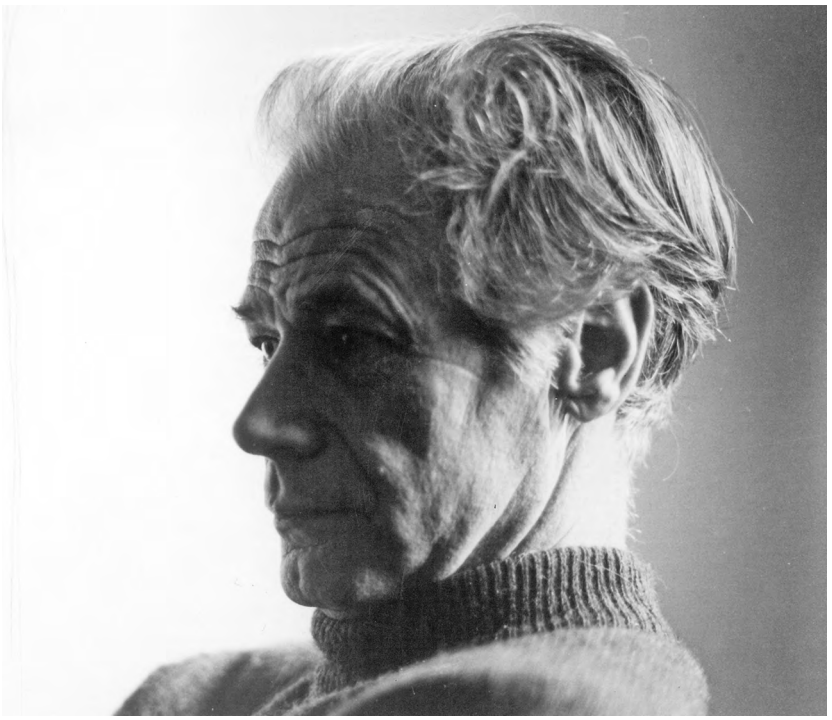
13 Andrew Wilson, 'A Psychiatrist for Nations in Conflict', *Bulletin*, 27 July 1982, 81–82. The Bill was before both Houses of Congress but seems to have died before the next session.

14 See in particular John's work, *Resolving Deep-rooted Conflict: A Handbook* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987) and *Conflict Resolution: Its Language and Processes* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1996).



**John the academic, USA, mid-1980s.**
Source: Family collection.

His theory was founded on the assumption that individuals, families and communities have basic needs that extend beyond physical needs of food, clothing and shelter. They include, for example, the need for identity and respect. Hostilities, confrontations and wars, triggered by seemingly obvious events, usually arose out of perceived failures to have certain of these needs met and, John came to believe, that conflict resolution should be directed towards analysis of the behavioural and systemic sources of the conflict.

The GMU's Center for Conflict Analysis and Resolution (CCAR) gave John the opportunity to further develop thinking and to teach and train others in the field. Unlike the time he headed a government department as a young man, here he was seen as 'an elder' – 'Mother Burton', one of his colleagues called him – a better position from which to lead new thinking. According to Dunn, it was at GMU that John saw that basic human needs were central to conflict and its resolution: 'He went beyond Maslow in articulating the framework from which he developed a research agenda

that would allow him to look at conflict as a whole and the need to delve into its sources and causes for its resolution.'[15] John further developed his belief that disputing nations were more likely to express their real concerns behind closed doors where there was no need for rhetoric for public ears.

My daughter Amanda and I spent time with John and Betty in Washington DC in 1986. I recall John telling us about his participation in the facilitation of peace talks under the auspices of CCAR between members of the British Parliament and the Argentine Congress to discuss the Falkland/Malvinas dispute. A study of the dispute revealed that the real goal of Argentina was the country's acceptance as a 'Western' state and not recognition of its claim to sovereignty of the islands as such. Disputes such as this and that of the Greek and Turkish Cypriots demonstrated to him the benefits of an analytical problem-solving approach as against power negotiation.[16]

These 'track two' initiatives concerned with informal, unofficial efforts to resolve or mitigate violent, intractable conflicts were also utilised in Northern Ireland, Sudan, Liberia and elsewhere. Records of them are contained in the conflict and peace research archive at 'Point of View', the CCAR institute's retreat, research and conference centre, Masons Neck, Virginia. From offering postgraduate studies in the field, CCAR developed a prestigious university teaching program to become what it is today, the Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter School for Peace and Conflict Resolution (the Carter School).

Much has been written about his work. The John Burton Library and Resource Center at the Carter School, with its dedicated focus on conflict analysis and resolution, attests to this. I found an example of John's international influence in the field in Karin Utas Carlsson's work *Violence Prevention and Conflict Resolution*. The report covers Maslow's human needs theory and an alternative paradigm for peace and was distributed by the Department of Educational and Psychological Research at the Malmö School of Education, Sweden, in 1999. In including an analysis of John's theory, the author states that she is very much influenced by Burton's thinking. Her dedication, 'To Markus and his generation', highlights the work of Einstein and Burton. It reads:

15 Personal communication, 18 April 2019.

16 Burton, 'Conflict Analysis', unpublished paper, 1994, 41, Burton family file.

> 'Our world is threatened by a crisis whose extent seems to escape those within whose power it is to make major decisions for good or evil. The unleashed power of the atom has changed everything except our ways of thinking. Thus we are drifting toward a catastrophe beyond comparison. We shall require a substantially new manner of thinking if man-kind is to survive.' (A. Einstein, 1946.)
>
> 'It would be a shift in thinking of a profound kind – like finding the earth is round and not flat – if we were to discover that conflicts have generally a win-win potential and not a win-lose one.' (J. W. Burton, 1986.)[17]

In 1988, John became a 'Distinguished Jennings Randolph Fellow' of the US Institute of Peace. On 26 April that year, he delivered the second Annual Vernon M. and Minnie I. Lynch Lecture, entitled, 'On the Need for Conflict Prevention'. Over time, John authored more than 20 books on world peace and the theory and practice of conflict resolution, starting with *The Alternative* in 1954 and finishing with *Violence Explained* in 1997.[18]

Throughout the time John lived in the UK and the USA, he wrote fortnightly air letters addressed to 'Dear all' and, using carbon copies, he sent them to each of Meredith, Clare and me, and some to Cecily and Robert. They kept coming, whether we answered or not. They were mostly undated other than the note 'Monday' or 'Sunday' – John had little feel for history – and written for the moment to check in on us and keep us informed of his doings. Today these letters are a rich source of archival material on his work, the international disputes in which he was involved, on world affairs and how he viewed them at the time. I kept them, partly because of my interest and studies in international relations and because I was impressed with his persistence in working to find solutions to war and violence. I am grateful to David Dunn who, when undertaking research for *From Power Politics to Conflict Resolution*, painstakingly put the letters into chronological order with reference to postmarks where available and events and conferences mentioned in the letters.

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17 Karin Utas Carlsson, *Violence Prevention and Conflict Resolution: A Study of Peace Education in Grades 4–6*, Studia Psychologica Et Paedagogica Series Altera CXIV (Malmö: Department of Educational and Psychological Research, Malmö School of Education, 1999), accessed 10 April 2021, tradet.org/filer/avh_peaceed.pdf.

18 John Burton, *Violence Explained: The Sources of Conflict, Violence and Crime and Their Provention* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997).

The most notable aspect of John's personal philosophy, which I believe drove his thinking, was the consistency of his belief that the path to world peace was through global economic stability and – putting it boldly at its highest – prosperity. From a young age he saw self-determination and freedom from exploitation as important to achieving this. In his senior years, John saw those as important in satisfying the basic human need of belonging – that is, identity. The influence of his father and his Methodist teachings was strong during his childhood and provided the basis for the philosophy that drove the development of his political and economic ideals. His thinking was reinforced from his public service experience that, in turn, informed his later intellectual and practical work in the fields of international and domestic conflict resolution. Because so much has been written about John's work in the field of analysis of conflict and resolution that supports the view that his philosophy and political agenda were driven by these idealistic notions, there is no need for me to attempt to cover John's 'real career' in detail. Others qualified in the field are more able to do it justice.

What is left for me to do, having attempted to paint a full picture of John's earlier life in Australia, is to continue his story from the time he returned to Australia in 1989 to live out the rest of his life. However, because John's influence as a public servant in postwar Australia has remained a subject of historical controversy, it is worth mentioning here that, after John's death in 2010, Dennis Richardson, then secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and previously head of ASIO and therefore well-placed to know who John was and what he stood for, described John as 'a distinguished and highly respected member of the Department of External Affairs'.[19] He said, 'Many years on he still has a place of honour in the Department, which he headed up.' Important to me, too, is the Australian War Memorial's recent recognition of John as an important 'peacemaker' in Australia's foreign policy history.[20]

19 Letter Dennis Richardson to Betty Nathan, 30 June 2010, Burton family file.

20 Peter Londey, 'Brave New Australia', *Wartime* (Australian War Memorial) magazine, no. 88 (Spring 2019). Londey drew on his research on John Burton's role in the development of Australia's postwar foreign policies and strategic allegiances for a forthcoming volume of the Official History of Australian Peacekeeping, Humanitarian and Post–Cold War Operations series.

# 39

# Coming full circle: Cecily, Robert, John and all

I do not recall that John visited us again in Canberra between his and Leone's visit to Australia in 1980 and mid-1986 when I played an unintended role in the advent of the return of the prodigal father. I was diagnosed with second-stage breast cancer – a scary illness in those days – and feeling powerless from a distance, John wrote to Cecily asking to be kept informed. Cecily was by then the undoubted resolute head of our Australian family. She kept John informed of my progress without questioning or judging him. The family pulled together to consider what treatment options might be most effective. John buried his hurt with what Canberra and ANU had dished out to him many years earlier and came to Australia with Betty to share Christmas with us that year. We welcomed them warmly and, to our surprise, on their next visit they purchased a holiday house on the NSW south coast, with an intention of visiting more often. John enjoyed having his family again. The treatment I had lasted for several years before I was finally out of the woods, the ordeal benefiting the whole family: large family gatherings became a custom. Our half-brother Mark visited us too and became a 'real' brother to his Australian sisters.

In 1989, on an occasion when John and Betty were travelling home from the south coast, they stopped to inspect a farmhouse with large acreage for sale, 'Witwood'. It was near Braidwood and just a 20-minute drive from my Bungendore rural home where I had been living with a menagerie of animals for some years. Well into his 70s, John decided to become a farmer again! He and I had now had rural lives in common, although John became a real farmer while I commuted to Canberra daily to run my law practice.

**John and Cecily, the matriarch, mid-1980s.**
Source: Family collection.

Betty had family of her own in the USA whom she did not want to leave. She and John came to a deal. They would spend half the year in Australia and half in the States with a manager in charge of the farm. In the short time they lived there, before John's health failed him, he planted hundreds of trees down the 1-kilometre driveway to act as a wind and fire break, installed irrigation for them and acquired 50 head of Aberdeen Angus and Hereford cattle. He ran his cattle, shot foxes and kept up his writing at their Braidwood home. The improvements he made to the property and his farming methods once more attracted interest of neighbours and others.

In 1993, the day before a guest interested in John's farming techniques came to visit, John noticed strangers stomping over his property and was momentarily alarmed, believing he was under surveillance again. The guest was would-be farmer Bill Hayden, then governor-general of Australia. His term was coming to an end and he wanted to return to Queensland and run cattle, too, and presumably, his security guards wanted to first check out Witwood. Hayden, who I had met through Ramsey when Hayden was opposition leader of the Labor Party, was younger than my father and the two had never met, although they knew of each other. I had told my father of Hayden's wish to visit his farm to obtain some farming tips, so

John and Betty opened their home to him. John usually rode around the paddocks on his four-wheel rider with his dog sitting behind him. On this occasion John showed the governor-general around in his car.

Coombs visited John at his farm too. It was not far from Judith Wright's property 'The Edge' within the Half Moon wildlife reserve near Braidwood. Neither Cecily nor John, as close as they had been to Coombs and Wright over the decades, were aware of the love connection that had developed between the two by the 1970s, only that they had worked together on some Indigenous and environmental issues they both felt passionate about. With my lawyer's hat on, I engaged with Wright to discuss some legalities surrounding some of her social activism.[1] Cecily kept in touch with both of them individually. After Wright's husband Jack died in 1966, she had moved to Braidwood and, from that time on, she and Coombs saw more of each other and corresponded regularly. They enjoyed a deep but secret love attachment for the rest of their lives. Their love story was revealed by letters made available after their deaths.[2] Their romance is reflected in Canberra's heritage; two of Canberra's new western suburbs that lie snugly side by side in Molonglo Valley are named Wright and Coombs.[3] After his visit to John's Braidwood farm, Coombs attended more of our family events in Canberra but we never saw him and Wright socially together.[4]

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1 Judith Wright had two missions to benefit others, about which she consulted me in the late 1970s at my legal practice, Pamela Coward & Associates. She wanted to bequeath her 41-hectare Braidwood property 'The Edge', which she regarded as a wildlife refuge, to ANU, and she wanted to draft and execute an Aboriginal Treaty with the Australian Government. The latter was in her capacity as secretary of the Aboriginal Treaty Committee (1979–83) and history tells us of the fate of that mission. As to the former, I had no success because the university protested that it had no budget to upkeep the property. In 1984, Judith bequeathed the property to the Australian people for ecological research through ANU. Judith died from a heart attack in Canberra on 25 June 2000 and was not to know the property would eventually be sold on the open market to a private buyer.

2 Miyuki Jokiranta, prod., *Love and Fury: Judith Wright & 'Nugget' Coombs*, ABC Program, 23 April 2013, and broadcast on ABC Radio, 19 April 2013. Judith lived alone at The Edge in her later years.

3 The story of Judith and Nugget's relationship is told in Fiona Capp, 'In the Garden: Judith Wright and Nugget Coombs', *The Monthly*, June 2009, accessed 6 April 2021, www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2009/june/1274320360/fiona-capp/garden.

4 For correspondence regarding ANU management of The Edge, see Papers of Judith Wright, NLA, MS 5781, box 81, file 583. Under the terms of Wright's bequest, the property was to be used for ecological research. In 1999, the university told Wright it had no further use for it. The university gave it to the Duke of Edinburgh's Award for just $1. It was sold on the open market for almost half a million dollars in 2014.

For New York–raised Betty, her new lifestyle could not have been more different. She adapted graciously and embraced her Australian family, including Cecily and Robert. She wrote a delightful novel set in the arty country town of Braidwood and the surrounding Australian farmland, *Top Paddock* (1993). Its protagonist is, of course, an Australian academic farmer, and the good and evil characters are a delightful (sometimes not so well-disguised) mix of family members, friends and townsfolk she had met.

**Nugget Coombs and John, Canberra, 1993, at Meredith's home.**

Source: Family collection.

**Betty and John gardening at 'Witwood', near Braidwood, NSW, early 1990s.**

Source: Family collection.

**Clare and Cecily, family Christmas 1992, at Pam's farm, 'Yarrandale'.**
Source: Family collection.

My father and I both prepared well for bushfires, a real threat for both our properties. We relied on tank water and our own devices to protect our homes. But, in 1994, Robert and Cecily, living in suburban Canberra were the ones affected. The fire came over the hill from Mount Stromlo and into their garden. It burnt some of their grounds but spared their Curtin home.

From 1986 onwards, our family continued our Christmas gatherings: John, Betty, Cecily and Robert, Meredith, Clare and me, and sometimes various of our former partners with whom Cecily as the family glue had always kept in touch. Cecily made it easier for us all to negotiate our way through our lives and relationships and, thanks to her uniting skills and the generous natures of Robert and Betty, we became a warm and inclusive extended family.

In the meantime, a cloud had formed on the horizon for Robert. While I was still receiving chemotherapy, Robert's eldest, Rod, was diagnosed with lymphoma. Robert suffered the agony of watching his son undergo gruelling treatment for the disease to which he ultimately succumbed. Rod died in 1988. Robert and Cecily had supported each other through Rod's and my illnesses and, while each was desperate that their own offspring would survive, they each cared deeply for their stepchildren. Robert played a father role to me in my late teen years, and Cecily was an important figure in Rod's and his young daughter's life. John's return and the resultant close relationships that grew between our extended family and the respect each of our parents and step-parents had for each other was a joy and comfort to us three girls and our half-brother Mark. We gathered often for family celebrations at my rural property equidistant to John's farm and Canberra. As I recovered from surgery and the effects of radiation and chemotherapy, the family 'healed'.

John and Betty's two-country living arrangements worked for a time until John suffered a massive heart attack in 1993. He was ambulanced to Canberra for hospital but was too weak and ill to undergo an operation. He was transferred to Sydney and was confined to bed at his sister's Wahroonga home until he made a shaky recovery sufficient to undergo a triple bypass. It was touch and go, but he survived. From his St Vincent's Hospital recovery bed, John made phone calls to real estate agents. Ahead of a slump in rural property prices, he achieved a sale of his well-kept property and cattle as a going concern. Betty and John moved into a house in a leafy street of Bruce in Canberra, a stone's throw from Calvary Hospital. John did make a trip back to the USA with Betty, but had another heart attack alighting from a plane and, after getting themselves home, he could not travel so far afield again. Clare, who had lived in Sydney and Brisbane, but not Canberra since she was young, moved back to Canberra and bought a house in O'Connor where Meredith already lived. We were a complete Canberra-based family again.

**‘Open Day’, Melrose Valley, Tuggeranong, 1995.**
Left to right: Robert, Cecily, John, Betty, (Pam not in view), Meredith.
Source: Family collection.

**Clare, Cecily and John, Cecily’s 80th birthday party at Clare’s house, O’Connor, Canberra.**
Source: Family collection.

**John and Betty, Canberra, mid-1990s.**
Source: Family collection.

Betty made short trips alone to the USA where her children and grandchildren lived. John defied the medical odds. He survived several ambulance emergencies for TIAs (mini-strokes) and, according to his cardiologist, he lived some 20 years beyond what the state of his progressive heart failure indicated he might. If patient control over their body is an indicator of prospects of survival, no wonder John did so well. He wrote a four-page closely typed letter to his specialist in November 1998 attaching handwritten charts of his fluid intake and blood pressure, detailing his clinical history and how he felt and what he did about it over a period of two days. He explained that he had, in his area of work, been 'advocating getting at the roots of problems, explanations, before remedies'.[5] He conceded that this might not be relevant in this case and that maybe his suffering was just typical old-age and that he should 'let time take its course'. He signed off, 'Over to you'. Because of the care provided by his bemused and conscientious medical team and Betty's loving dedication to John's care, he survived another 12 years. Betty had reasonably expected John to die sooner and had planned to return to the USA where her grandchildren were fast growing up, but she stayed to be with John.

5 Collection of letters, Burton family file.

**John at his desk, Canberra, c. 2007.**
Source: Family collection.

Inactive in body, John was not inactive in his mind. He spent time writing, and from his armchair, he thought and talked about his developing ideas. He also listened to, and talked with, the myriad of carers who came to the house to provide respite for Betty. He liked hearing their stories as they prepared lunch for him and assisted with chores. Many of them opened up to him about family difficulties or their career aspirations. Some brought their wives or partners to one of his Friday night soirees to meet him. John and Betty's Friday night open house soirees at their home in Bruce became legendary. Family, ex-spouses, friends, some foes, former colleagues, PhD students, academics and journalists dropped in. Planet John was a drawcard, despite his failing hearing, being virtually chair ridden and reliant on a portable oxygen cylinder and a walker to move about. Betty set out glasses, cheese and biscuits and other bites to eat, not knowing if 5 or 15 people would arrive on any particular Friday evening. They were noisy, informative and happy events, the conversation usually current political issues and always lively. Children who came with their parents would drop into the pool adjacent to the living room that, solar heated and enclosed, John swam in regularly for gentle exercise while he was able.

Cecily and Robert came often while they could. John and Robert had a more formal relationship than they enjoyed when they were young. Cecily, however, now spoke her mind, expressed her thoughts and was critical of John's sweeping assertions when she thought fit, and John listened to her. She responded to one of the draft articles he gave her in March 2006 with: 'I think your ideas for the future are wonderful, very much to be wished for. But your way of expressing them is something else again!' She provided constructive comments and concluded with 'I am glad you gave me the chance to comment. Thanks! I am reminded of the early, early days of working on *The Alternative* et al.'[6] John remained a thinker and kept reading and writing, attempting to persuade those family, friends and colleagues around him to pursue his work. He wanted to establish a Peace Institute, and in a vain effort to fund it by winning the *Reader's Digest* 'jackpot' he became a subscriber. He drafted a paper, 'The Mess We Are In', apologising to the younger generations for the state of the world left for them to live in. He died before it was completed.[7]

From our perspective, John learned a lot from Cecily and her ability to listen to people. This occurred too late from Cecily's perspective, but at least others benefited. With regard to her relationship with John, they had come full circle. She no longer required nor sought his approval. Cecily and John still cared for each other. John admired her legs, which were still shapely at age 80. Cecily still loved him, though, as she often told us, 'I could never live with him'. She was her own person and it was John who now looked up to and admired her.

Betty, intelligent and interesting, with a love of culture and Australian Aboriginal art in particular, was accepting of the family dynamics, and engaged fully with us all; she knew that John truly loved her. The one happy and successful marriage in the five that took place in which Cecily or John were involved was that of Betty and John. They married in October 2006 when John was age 91, after they had been living together in blissful unity for 20 years. John was almost confined to a chair and went nowhere without oxygen. Why did they marry at that time? John told Meredith that it was about 'public commitment'.

6 Burton family file.

7 The draft paper is held on the Burton family file.

Betty's story is different. In 2019, having just turned 90, she told me by email that the reason for their marriage arose from the fall John had when he cracked a few of his ribs, before he made the effort to get out of bed to respond to Prime Minister Howard's vicious *Quadrant* dinner speech. His immobility required more physical help than he liked to admit. He kept urging her to return to the USA to be near her children. They had never discussed marriage; at their age it had not seemed important. She sensed that John's Methodist upbringing was causing him, perhaps, to worry about the situation he had placed her in and so, she asked him: 'Would you want me to stay with you if we were married?' His face lit up and he replied, 'Yes.'

They intended to have a private ceremony without involving the family. However, they could not contain their excitement and, when they told us, we insisted on 'crashing' the event – or at least be allowed to stand in a corner of the room and witness the occasion. It was a romantic ceremony conducted by a celebrant in their living room and John stood up to take his vows. They looked radiant; Betty in a flowing summer dress and John wearing an embroidered silk waistcoat that Mark, his son, had given him some years earlier. John's mind was sharp, his dry sense of humour intact and his love for Betty patent. Sadly, Clare was no longer with us to celebrate the occasion.

**John and Betty, wedding day, October 2006.**
Source: Family collection.

**John relaxing on his wedding day, October 2006.**
Source: Family collection.

# 40

# A family shattered: Loss of Clare

On 1 August 1998, family tragedy struck; John's and Cecily's lives were never the same again. Clare suffered acute abdominal pain and was hospitalised. On 10 August she was diagnosed with widespread cancer; it was possible that it was ovarian cancer in origin, but we will never know. It was too late to treat her. She declined rapidly, stoically staying alert to arrange her affairs and to say goodbye to her three children and other relatives and friends. She died in hospital 12 days after being admitted, on 23 August 1998. Her sudden illness and death shattered us. The tragedy had a uniting effect on the family, but the loss of a child is one that no parent should have to go through. We watched this brave being, our sister, adjust rapidly to her unexpected fate. She made a list of friends and past loves to whom she particularly wanted to say goodbye. They came from near and far. The hospital waiting room had no less than three or more bodies sleeping overnight those 12 days, to keep a watch over her and be there.

It affected Cecily badly. Her relationship with Clare was complex. Clare did not spare Cecily her conviction that Cecily's nurturing of her as a baby contributed to Clare's emotional difficulties into her adulthood. She unwittingly hurt Cecily by 'dumping' this on her over many years. In hindsight, Clare's illness might have contributed to her anger and to some irrational behaviour we observed. Cecily, forever the counsellor, had responded as a counsellor would – at arms' length – allowing Clare to believe that Cecily could take criticism in her stride. But Cecily found

Clare's intensity of feeling confronting. Cecily talked with Clare when and whenever Clare wanted to talk, pushing down her own hurt, in order to help Clare, but Cecily felt that she had failed as Clare's mother.

Clare and I often argued and we had a troubled sisterly relationship. For me, the love and appreciation she exuded when I had time alone with her at the hospital warmed my heart. I knew we had always loved each other and, in a way, our emotional closeness as siblings got in the way of a friendship as adults. As children, despite the age differences, Clare and I were closer playmates and confidantes than were Clare and Meredith or Meredith and me. When it mattered, we were close again, for which I am grateful.

In April that year, Clare had ended her relationship with her partner Geoff, who she had been living with in Canberra, and he returned to his home state of Queensland before Clare fell acutely ill. Clare worked very hard in the months May to August as an employment equity consultant and undertook major gender equity projects with various organisations as required by them. Her most significant was Women in the Australian Defence Force. She held interviews with senior managers, staff and women with grievances, and collated massive amounts of material for the reports she wrote in order to examine the cultural, social and institutional barriers to the merit-based progression of women in their careers.

She was about to board a flight to New Zealand to embark on work for its defence forces when the onset of severe pain caused her to cancel her arrangements. After she was first admitted to hospital, her pain eased and she was discharged with a misdiagnosis of twisted colon. Our close family friend Doug Cocks lived nearby and visited her twice daily. Late one night, she telephoned him, in pain and frightened. He drove straight around to see her and she told him she thought she was going to die. The next morning Meredith joined them to discuss what should be done. I came in from my farm to talk with her. Having recovered from my poor cancer prognosis, I had become expert in navigating the medical maze. I will never forget the gist of our conversation. Clare was convinced that she had cancer. I assured her, with words to the effect of, 'No, Clare, your pain is too acute. Pain of that severity would only happen at the very last stages of cancer, not at this time, before any diagnosis.' How right *and* wrong I was. She was readmitted to hospital thin, in pain and unhappy. By 13 August it was realised that the cancer was well-advanced and she

had possibly only months to live. Doug rang Meredith from the hospital too distressed to be coherent. Meredith went to the hospital and was greeted by Clare with, 'We never did know who would be the first to go.'

Before Meredith could adjust to the news or telephone us, Clare discussed with her how she could recover money owed to her for her consulting work that she wanted her children to have. Meredith phoned us and, later that day, we all, including Cecily, John and Betty and one of Clare's children, Kate (Charlie) who then lived in Canberra, gathered at the hospital.

Clare's spirits lifted to a degree; she finally had a diagnosis and was under competent medical care. She had insufficient time to face the reality of death – or had she done this in the days gone by when she was in so much suffering at home? Was it just us, suffering from having so little time to come to grips with her certain pending death? Clare kept up our spirits – in a literal sense too. We brought in gin and tonic one evening and poured drinks for everyone. Clare sipped too, while we drew up rosters to ensure that Clare had company round the clock. A day or so later, we urged that she be transferred to the public ward and abandon her private insurance so that she would have 24-hour access to doctors for pain relief as required. Reliance on a specialist medical practitioner in a private hospital might work well for a broken leg, but I knew that only the public system had medical teams to deal adequately with serious and complex medical conditions. It was the right move.

Within another day or two, Clare was skin and bones; her stomach had filled up with fluid and new pains developed every day. She required increased doses of morphine. Doug stayed overnight at the hospital, every night except once when an ex-boyfriend of Clare's flew in from interstate and stayed overnight instead. Her children, Rachael, Steve and Charlie, did the same, bedding down in the waiting room. They suffered badly. Their father and his wife came from Sydney to see Clare and support their distraught children. Clare was joyous that she lived to see Steve's firstborn, Ben, her first grandchild.

Too many people wanted to see Clare and the stimulation was too much for her. She tried to engage with them through a cloud of morphine. We all wanted to be needed. I tried too hard to be practical, offering advice about treatment options, and it was altogether too much for her and she said so. Cecily struggled to cope. She missed visiting only one day when it became too much for her. However, Cecily played the valuable

role as postbox, communicating with everyone and looking after their needs, despite her own immense suffering. Our father just sat around, wanting to be there, saying little.

Meredith and I managed our work commitments as best we could. Meredith was deputy vice-chancellor of the University of Canberra at the time. She travelled between the university and Calvary Hospital to fit in two to three visits a day. I drove between my farm, my barristers' chambers in the city and the hospital, and tried to meet commitments to hear cases scheduled to come before me on an administrative appeals tribunal. The family worked well as a team, powerless and deeply distressed at the prospect of the loss of Clare.

My children suffered from afar, keeping in touch with us by phone. They both then lived in Tasmania. Cassandra and her older sister, Amanda, were orphaned when they were just six and seven respectively when my then husband Dan and I took over their care. Clare had known their natural parents and the plight they faced in the knowledge that the father had a short life-expectancy. When, unexpectedly, the children's mother died, leaving the two little girls in the care of their unwell father, he had urged Clare to find foster parents for them after his death. Amanda and Cassandra had a special bond with Clare.

Lying in her hospital bed, Clare kept her sense of humour and encouraged us to engage with it. She laughed recalling past memories. She made amusing, sometimes caustic, observations about the medical team and others around her. Each of us, after spending time with her, shared her priceless words with others when we returned to the waiting room. As sick as Clare was, one or other of us was there to accompany her and her drains and morphine drip to the balcony several times a day and during the night for her much-needed cigarette. On these occasions, she was at her most amusing. It was not the time to urge her to give up her smokes.

Treatment options were limited. No one knew what sort of cancer she had, only that she was now suffering from extreme irritation to her stomach lining. She received conflicting advice from two specialists, an oncologist brought in when her dire condition was apparent and the other a palliative care doctor. She asked that both be present together and air the opinions in front of her so that she could assess the pros and cons. The two male medicos stood at the end of her bed and exchanged their points of view. Clare listened and when they appeared to find common ground, she rolled her hands in a 'wrapping up' motion and asked: 'Have we reached

a consensus?' They had. Chemotherapy could be tried in an effort to stall the spread of cancer. However, within days, it became apparent that palliative care was the only realistic option. Then, a decision was made that, for her comfort, fluid from her stomach should be tapped. The entry of a drain was likely to cause infection and lead to a quicker death. She accepted the drain knowing she might not make it to a palliative care facility. Her stomach was drained regularly and by 22 August it was clear that Clare was fading fast. She retained her amazing spirit. She asked that I work with her with pen and pad in hand, to take notes, fill in forms and not leave anything about her estate to chance after she died. She delegated to others too, ensuring that all her affairs were in order and that her consultative work was handed on to appropriate experts. Meredith and Doug had set off to inspect Clare Holland House hospice for Clare. They returned to hospital to find Clare vomiting.

Clare died the next day. She was 55. Cecily was suffering beyond what she could cope with. Robert had a minor operation scheduled for the day following Clare's death. Cecily had to be there for him. A week on, Meredith's journal records the state of dysfunction most of us were in. She wrote of Clare's death, of her own daughter and one of Clare's not being well, of Cecily being 'a wreck' and of John 'soldiering through'. At the same time, when she needed him most, Meredith's man had let her down by returning to be with his former partner.

Clare had a huge intellect, a forceful personality, sometimes difficult to converse with if your views did not exactly coincide, and had become well-known and much loved by feminists and others for her internationally acclaimed work on gender equity in the workforce. Her doctoral thesis was published in 1995 as *Subordination: Feminism and Social Theory – a History of Ideas* and was, according to (Dame) Quentin Bryce, later governor-general, an 'acclaimed' text. Bryce said:

> Clare wanted to change the world, and she did.
>
> She did so through her extraordinary contribution to the Women's Movement and in particular to women's employment opportunities and experiences.
>
> Clare was digging deeper and deeper into where gender bias is located.[1]

1 Quentin Bryce, 'Burton, Clare (1942–1998)', *Obituaries Australia*, accessed 10 April 2021, oa.anu.edu.au/obituary/burton-clare-1373.

**Clare as we remember her.**
Source: Family collection.

Clare's contribution to gender equity and a better world has lived on through her work. She co-authored *Women's Worth: Pay Equity and Job Evaluation* (1987) and wrote *The Promise and the Price* (1991). Annual lectures on gender equity take place in her name, ANU has a scholastic award in her name, and a street in the Canberra suburb of Franklin is named Clare Burton Crescent.

Clare asked that her memorial service take place at the Methodist National Memorial Church in Forrest. Her request surprised us. We had all attended that church from time to time, and Meredith and Clive were married there. However, we were atheists so we were not into church-based worshipping. We planned a service for family and friends and chose those to speak and reminisce about Clare, including Quentin Bryce. On arriving at the church, we were overwhelmed to find a crowded quadrangle of people: women and men, from all over, who came to farewell Clare. On entering the church, there was a large feminist banner at the front behind which people were to speak.

It was wonderful to see the esteem in which Clare was held by so many, but sad at the time – particularly for her children – to have the quiet service turn into a large public event with many unscheduled speakers wanting to participate. Perhaps even more sad for me and Meredith and probably our parents is how little we knew about the changes she made to so many lives. We were inundated with letters and emails, and we read obituaries, from all of which we learned more about Clare and her work. We owned copies of her books, and knew about the consultancies she undertook in Australia and New Zealand to rid the defence forces, universities and elsewhere of gender inequality, but we did not engage enough with Clare about her work and achievements. Why? Partly because she had lived away for so long until her move to Canberra a few years before her death, but often because emotional baggage from our family life caused us to fear that robust discussion of political or feminist issues might turn into emotional brawls that would end in tears – hers and mine, in particular.

There is no doubt that Clare experienced a deal of unhappiness in the last year or so of her life. None of us had an inkling of her relationship breakdown before she separated from Geoff, except for Cecily who Clare had being seeing for months about it. Geoff, who had left his Queensland home and job to live with Clare, was devastated at her change of heart. He felt that he had been given no warning that she was unhappy living with him, other than an awareness that her outbursts of anger had

increased. We now know that Clare was ill, very ill, and that she had received inappropriate medication from her doctor for pain relief for various inadequately diagnosed symptoms. It is enough to account for her unhappiness and apparent erratic behaviour.

When Clare died, Cecily told us that she felt they had never 'reconciled'. That puzzled me. I had seen the genuine warmth with which Clare spoke to Cecily of her love and gratitude in those last days as she lay dying in hospital. It was hard to get Cecily to articulate why she felt this way, other than to say that she believed they had not come to any true understanding. Just as Cecily felt that she and her own mother had never reconciled before her mother died, she felt with Clare that a rift that had developed between them had never closed. That disturbed Cecily deeply. Cecily did not want a photo of Clare to have in her home. She said that having a photo of smiling faces reflected nothing of the real person. 'They don't speak to me, as people present do.' It seemed the pain and hurt was far too great. Then, Cecily's spiritualism, in all likelihood, allowed her to carry Clare in her heart and to remember her as a daughter she truly loved.

John's relationship with Clare was fraught. A love–hate one? Love, yes, and of course not hate in the real sense, but close at times. I can see now that Clare was unhappy at home as a teen. She and John's past issues never resolved. As an adult, Clare challenged and argued with him about feminist issues about which he had limited understanding given the culture in which he grew up and worked. This, despite the fact that we grew up with no suggestion that women were restricted in their career choices, or enjoyment of lifestyle, by reason of gender.

Clare's death affected John deeply. He appeared to cope at age 83 with Betty by his side. However, a view I caught of him as I passed by their bedroom in the hallway of their house distressed me. He was alone, doubled over, head in his hands, kneeling on the floor, weeping. I had never seen him cry before, and never since. The loss of Clare let loose feelings that I had never experienced before either. It caused me to look back at how Cecily might have felt in December 1982, when her younger sister died of cancer – Pam, who Cecily loved very much. To lose a sister is heart-rending, but being her younger sister and one she was close to must have come as a terrible shock and affected Cecily profoundly. Did Robert, or any of us children, fully appreciate the ongoing grief and sense of loss that must have accompanied that event? Then, she suffered the death of her daughter. It left her, as it did the whole family, in the depths of sadness and despair.

# 41

# Blue autumn: Cecily passes

The glorious Canberra autumn sees leafy green trees and shrubs turn to yellow, then gold and red. I could see them through Cecily's hospital window, although she could not see out from her bed. It was the autumn of 2007. 'You've got to be out of here before the leaves drop,' I said. 'The prunus deep reds are in glorious contrast to the golden poplars.' 'My favourite season,' she replied. She saw none of that autumn. Cecily missed what she loved most – second to people – the beauty of her natural surroundings.

Cecily and Robert had, until the mid-1990s, remained physically fit for their ages. However, in 1994, Cecily had had a serious fall down her stairs at home. Shocked, sore, bruised and suffering a neck injury, she rested in bed for several days. She met her client commitments, counselling while lying in bed. When she felt well enough to walk, she attended a physiotherapist who insisted on an X-ray before touching her. It revealed broken neck vertebrae. A single wrong movement might have caused quadriplegia. Cecily was ambulanced to hospital and strapped onto a board to keep her flat until a surgeon was available to operate. She recovered reasonably well but her neck injury permanently limited her activities.

At that time, Robert still played tennis and his piano and both he and Cecily enjoyed walking, but their garden had become too much for them. By the time Cecily turned 80 in 1996, they agreed they needed more support. They purchased two independent living units attached to an aged-care facility in Deakin with a model of care of graduated living. They lived in one unit and Cecily saw her clients for counselling in the

other, situated across the hall. They could sit on their terrace among potted plants and walk in the well-developed community gardens that they did not have to look after. The move was not too soon. In August 1999, Robert had an operative procedure to remove his prostate gland, but bladder problems caused him to be incontinent and he had to wear pads day and night. His mobility was compromised from symptoms of Parkinson's disease. He required more and more of Cecily's assistance as his disease developed.

Caring for Robert took its toll on Cecily. A community nurse helped out with showering Robert two or three times a week, but Cecily had to carry the load of the rest of his care and care for herself. She changed his soiled sheets each morning, guided his tall body into a shower when a nurse was not available and to a chair during the day. Robert's carers took no notice of Cecily's needs. On one occasion, Cecily had a cold and felt wretched. She tried to keep up her counselling work, going from one apartment to the other, talking with clients, and checking in on Robert, until she could manage no longer and she ceased her counselling work.

At this time, in 2000, Cecily, physically and emotionally drained, started a journal. She wrote something each day. Often, she struggled to know what to write. She commenced with 'I don't feel like writing. Feel tired and ill, and a bit depressed'.[1] The next day she opened with, 'Don't feel like it much, but no doubt something will come'. And it did. Words poured out and her thoughts flowed. She reflected again on her childhood. One reflection was on how different she felt from others at school; that she was always questioning or disagreeing at least inwardly. She felt that other people were not interested in what she was interested in or thought. She wrote what seemed to be a constant feeling: 'I think I just felt hardly done by and misunderstood, and alone, lonely inside. Yet that would have been only a part of me. I wasn't a loner, just felt different.'

In a letter to my daughter Cassandra, Cecily also spoke frankly of her struggle coping with Robert's frailties:

> I have to admit, I suffer from quite a lot of resentment about the situation I am in and the enormous dependence Robert has on me. At times it seems too much to bear. I don't mean that he is clinging or demanding or anything like that, but the fact remains that I just have to be there almost all the time to attend to his various needs,

1 Cecily's 'Free writing', 2000, Cecily family file.

physical and mental. Without me he couldn't manage at all. Even the nurses and so on need help and guidance. It's quite frightening to think that I just have to keep well and strong enough to carry on indefinitely and I don't feel strong or well. However, I seem to keep going and I don't look like succumbing for a while. I can take a few hours off too, and I rest a lot, walk almost every day, read a lot and have lots of friends and relatives visiting. So, I don't dwell on difficulties which don't bear thinking about. I just wanted to let you know that I am from time to time a very resentful human being. However, I take loving care of Robert and we both do the best we can. So, we have more happiness than pain, I think.[2]

Soon, the situation became untenable. Once, in the presence of a nurse Cecily simply burst into tears, and the nurses realised that Cecily required respite. Robert spent periods of time at the Brindabella Gardens Nursing Home, which gave her a break. In 2002, Robert's illness had progressed beyond what Cecily could cope with, and he moved into permanent care at Brindabella Gardens' high care unit, Shakespeare Cottage. Meredith and I visited him regularly. Cecily took a taxi to visit him daily. Robert died at age 87 on 31 July 2002.

**Cecily caring for Robert, Brindabella Gardens Nursing Home, May 2002.**
Source: Family collection.

After Robert died, Cecily stopped writing, declaring in August 2002 that 'The mood has passed now'. She started again a few months later, in October 2002, heading her journal, 'The other side'. She opened with:

2 Undated letter, courtesy Cassandra.

> I feel very hesitant about writing this, yet I feel I need to, and I want to. The task sits over me and in me like a grey cloud. But why should it? I'm not writing in anger, I want to write only what is true, and I want to complete, or to try to complete the picture Rob has left of himself.[3]

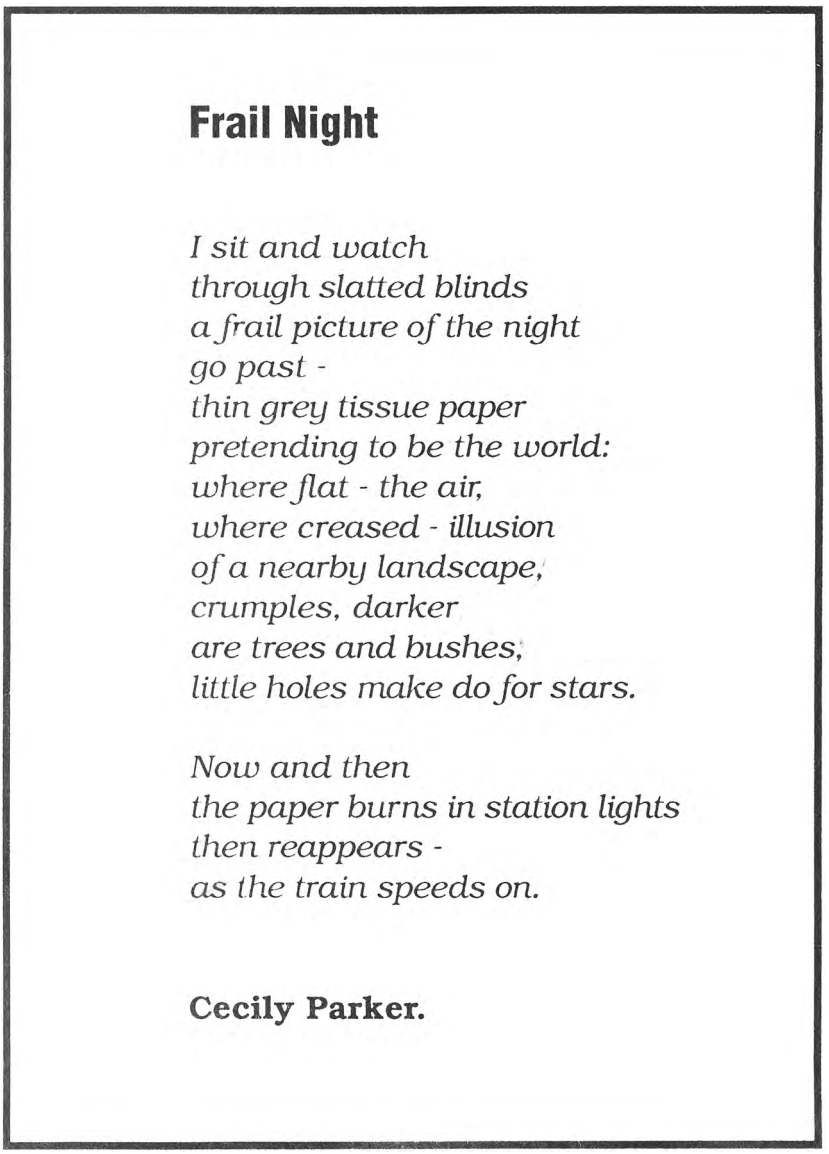
She took the opportunity of analysing their relationship in extraordinary detail, sorting out in her mind how she felt about Robert and the reasons for it as she wrote. It included Robert's 'niceness' to all appearances and the cruelty and unfairness she felt from his behaviour towards her. He was, she believed, 'not at all interested in me as a person, except perhaps in a detached, observing kind of way, and in a shallow way'. She went on to note both John's and Robert's failure to excuse or apologise for mistakes and never to do anything in the way she asked. She felt she had been treated with contempt by both of them. As I read this, I was surprised at the strength of Cecily's feelings about the behaviours of both of her husbands. Robert did have a distance from others in the way he related to them. Robert's former wife, Nancy, probably overcame this by her sheer outgoing exuberance. Surely Cecily, in counselling other married women, learned that even the most loving of male partners could find it humiliating to admit to being wrong, or demeaning to apologise for something or to take directions from them? Maybe no man could have understood and satisfied Cecily emotionally. I must ask, too, why Cecily felt she needed a sexual or marital partner to fulfil her need to be understood.

Cecily's health started to deteriorate seriously in August 2004 when she had the first of many more falls and was hospitalised. From the hospital bed she decided the time had come for her to move into a high care facility. She 'downsized' and moved from her apartment to a studio apartment in the main block of her Deakin facility where she could access more care. It had a kitchenette and was in easy access to a communal dining room. She had at least one meal a day in the dining room and someone would check on her if she did not show for it. She did well there for a while, but complained to us that she found the company of the older people there 'boring', and preferred to have her meals in her room. Nevertheless, she was polite and charming to her fellow residents and chatted to them when she did join in. Otherwise, she was happy in herself with television, videos and her radio for news, current affairs programs and classical music. She had plenty of books to read and many visitors.

3 Journal, 6 October 2002, Cecily family file.

In March 2006, a stroke led Cecily to an agonising six-week stay in hospital until she was well enough in May to be transferred to a pleasant and roomy residential rehabilitation facility near the hospital. The grandchildren visited her in hospital, some travelling from interstate. They loved her deeply and energised her to keep engaged with their lives, and from her bed she continued to offer them advice. By June, when she was discharged home, it was clear that Cecily was in need of more intensive care. She already had her name on the waiting list for Brindabella Gardens where Robert had experienced good care, and she activated her request to move. In September, after an anxious wait, she was given a room in Brindabella Gardens. It was small with an ensuite bathroom and a tiny veranda from which she could see birds and the gardens. Other than mealtimes when Cecily went to the dining room, she preferred to stay in her room and listen to the radio, read, and talk with her many visitors. She told us she did not want to sit around in the lounge area with a lot of old people, most of whom had lost acuity of mind. Many were non-verbal; others she thought, had verbal diarrhoea. We discussed her future with her. It was at this time that she wrote a living will in which she requested that she have no active treatment should she have another stroke or succumb to pneumonia. However, life does not work to a plan.

In March 2007, she had another fall. She was helped up and into bed and the following day had another fall. She was found on the floor, in pain, unable to be moved. Her carers did what had to be done and called an ambulance. She was taken to emergency to be checked out and have her pain relieved. Meredith's journal entry of 25 March 2007 captures aspects of the episode. Cecily had suffered crushed vertebrae in her lower back, she had fluid on her lung and infection, and had very low sodium levels. She was in need of oxygen. She was in a lot of pain and could hardly move, even to eat. Meredith and I listened to a myriad of questions doctors asked of Cecily in an effort to find the cause of her fall. She was lucid, knew who she was, where she was, and when asked who the current prime minister was, she answered: 'John Howard, unfortunately.' She was quite clear in instructing us, however, that having endured an ambulance ride to the hospital and the horror of waiting overnight in a crowded and noisy emergency unit, she would like to be treated for the cause of the fall. She hoped that her medication would be adjusted and that she would be discharged to the nursing home in a more comfortable state. She was admitted to a ward for treatment for a stroke and stayed in hospital for the whole of the 2007 autumn – the autumn she missed.



## Frail Night

*I sit and watch*
*through slatted blinds*
*a frail picture of the night*
*go past -*
*thin grey tissue paper*
*pretending to be the world:*
*where flat - the air,*
*where creased - illusion*
*of a nearby landscape,*
*crumples, darker*
*are trees and bushes;*
*little holes make do for stars.*

*Now and then*
*the paper burns in station lights*
*then reappears -*
*as the train speeds on.*

**Cecily Parker.**

**Cecily's poem 'Frail Night', published in the *Canberra Times*, October 1995.**

Source: Cecily family file.

I found a poem of Cecily's on an old cutting from an undated *Canberra Times* newspaper that is reflective of a sad soul, and apt to reproduce here. Cecily suffered depression in hospital. She expressed no wish to live. She could think of no reason to live and it was difficult for us to disagree with her. The injections of warfarin into her stomach to thin her blood caused her pain and bruising. However, the treating team saw it important that she be treated for depression before her true wishes about her future, and any will she might have to live, could be determined. It took time for anti-depressant medication to be effective. At times in hospital, Cecily refused to eat; she wanted to die. Then, when Meredith turned up with an Anzac (oatmeal) biscuit, Cecily smiled and could not resist it. When her anti-depressant medication took effect, the language she used about her life coming to an end changed. She said that she had lived a good life and that there was nothing more ahead of her to enjoy – other than her children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and friends.

John was concerned for Cecily. Not that he expressed his concern by a show of emotions. He asked after her on each occasion we returned from visiting her, absorbed the details of her treatment and asked what she wanted out of it. Although he, too, often expressed a wish that his life would end, when we told him that Cecily wanted that too, he was appalled. In principle, the concept of assisted dying appealed to them both. In practice, the mind and the body resisted the notion. In both John's and Cecily's cases, their brains seemed to keep their bodies ticking along, despite both having advanced heart disease. Each hoped that they might simply never wake from a sleep at some stage, but that just was not going to happen to either of them before enduring a good deal of misery, discomfort, hospital attention and a mishmash of medications. At this time, Meredith asked John what he considered the best things that had happened to him in his life. 'Not winning the seat of Lowe and buying a farm,' he said, and added, 'having kids.' He listed both Betty and Cecily. He told her that the marriage with Cecily had been good at the start, but that, given the times, she was not able to 'express her identity' through her work. Amused, Cecily thought that a rationalisation because it was John who stopped her from expressing her identity.[4]

4 Meredith's journal.

The stroke Cecily had suffered, while not leaving her with any significant paralysis, did release some of her inhibitions. Meredith and I spent a lot of time listening to her reflect on her life. She was frank about how she had felt over the years about significant people in it; she expressed her feelings in more detail than she had done before. She expressed deep guilt about being 'horrible' to her mother who had died so young. She also talked frankly about Robert and how her love for him had faded, mainly because of his inability to empathise with her. It was the same complaint she had about John, although he had never been as kind, nor polite, or gentle in demeanour, as had Robert. Nevertheless, Cecily told us that she was happy with what she had done with her life and hoped she had improved the lives of others through her counselling and her dream groups.

Meredith and I rostered our attendances around hospital meal times as, too often, meals would be left on Cecily's tray out of her reach. Her call buzzer was often out of reach too. When it was in reach, often when she pressed the button for a nurse to help her to the toilet, no one came. It was infuriating. Her medications often changed without reference to her previous regime and sometimes she was given drugs to which she was allergic. Meredith and I each spent five or so hours with her some days to monitor her care, convey her instructions and ensure she was awake when her treating team and her specialists in particular did their rounds; otherwise, she had to wait another day or two to see them. We were vocal and demanding and the nursing staff probably regarded us as 'sisters from hell'. We knew by this time that Cecily could not be discharged to her hostel room because she could no longer dress herself or walk to a dining room. On Sunday 8 April, Meredith wrote of Cecily:

> Right now, it sounds like she could die very soon – back on diuretics and so her sodium level will fall. She is very, very weak. For her sake, it won't be early enough. Again, this week has been hell for her. She was moved to geriatrics on Tuesday and we thought that would be better. For her, the attitude of nurses that she needs to be told what she wants really annoys her. … Pam went to meet the doctor 9.00 Thursday mainly to talk them into putting mum on oxygen when she left the hospital. She had to wait hours … and blew her top in frustration. Then doctors and nurses came from everywhere and at last focussed on extent of mum's multiple problems. Pam was at last relieved about the outcome. She is due

> home – to nursing home – Wednesday. Greatest news was getting a place for Mum in Shakespeare cottages where Robert had been: a room of her own. Very lucky as they come available so rarely.[5]

We and Cecily were indeed lucky. Cecily was discharged from hospital the following day direct to Brindabella Gardens' Shakespeare Cottage high care unit. Her new room looked out on to an oval where children spilled out after school. Cecily had to leave behind more of her personal belongings other than some special mementos. She had to say goodbye to so much in her life, her books, music tapes, clothes, gifts and personal papers. The sad process of ageing was softened only by her being placed in the best of hands for palliative management. Meredith captured the emotions in her journal entry of 15 April 2007:

> [Mum] thought it would be a miracle to be out of hospital by Wednesday but that was achieved. What a relief for everyone. So much less stress in the [nursing] home's quiet atmosphere and good staff. A day or two later she passes urine – another relief as otherwise back to hospital to get permanent catheter. Still not eating much but food much better. We are still visiting 2 times a day and around meal times. She likes seeing the kids playing in the oval out of the window, peewees there and autumn colours in the trees. Now she is comfortable. She says she is weaker every day and 'that is a good thing'! She worries Pam is not ready for her to go and wants me to keep telling Pam she is. Pam says she is ready.

Cecily kept her intellect to the end. She told me that some of the nurses at Shakespeare Cottage were angels. I was with her when one of her 'angels' came into her room. Cecily lay peacefully in bed with a tummy full of painkillers when I heard her ask the nurse her name. The conversation went like this:

> 'What is your name?'
>
> 'Hilary,' the angel said.
>
> 'How am I to remember that?'
>
> 'Easy. Sir Edmund Hillary,' said the nurse.
>
> 'What?'
>
> 'You know mum, the fella that climbed the mountain,' I said, trying to help out.
>
> 'No,' said Cecily. 'He has two Ls in his name.'

5 Meredith's journal.

Meredith and I were still vigilant about Cecily's care. We visited during the day and again before her bedtime to make sure her dentures were removed and cleaned, and that she was comfortable. Meredith recorded Cecily's last days:

> Sunday 22 April
>
> Mum is so weak. Eating nothing but a teaspoon or two of yoghurt and some milk. We gave her the bad news that the nurses don't think her death is imminent but we can't see how she can go on for much longer …
>
> Saturday 28 April
>
> Mum died just before noon, Thursday 26th. I was there but Pam was not which upset her greatly, especially because she was with her for hours the night before and was convinced that death was imminent and the nurses talked her out of that – no need to be there next day. She died relatively peacefully – a few grunts at the end, and then peace.

Cecily was no longer with us. John survived her by three years and died on 23 June 2010. They both left their separate legacies – cherished by those who knew them.

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